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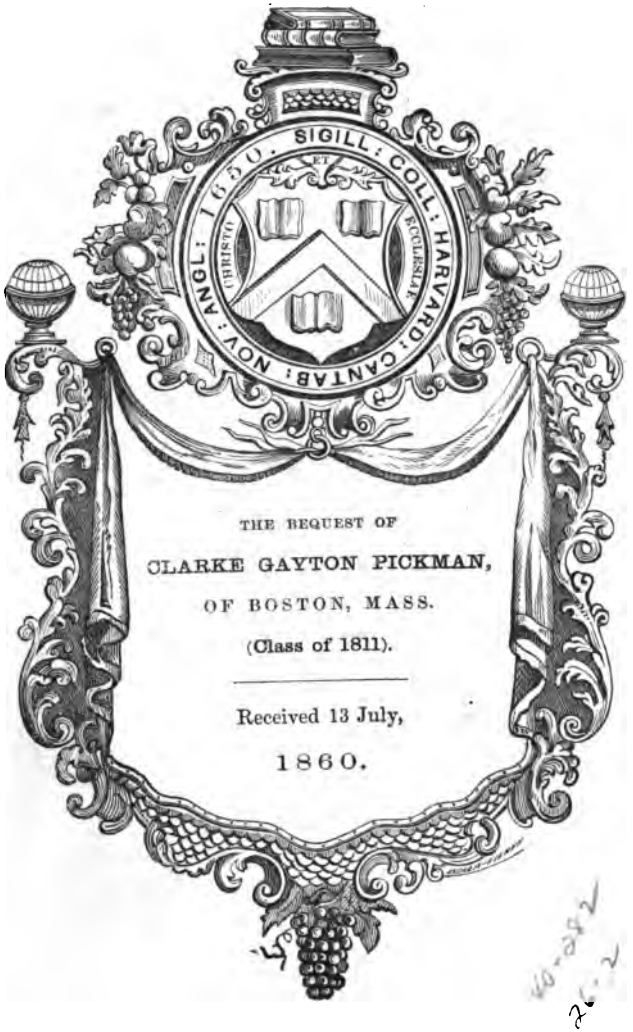

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THOUGHTS

ON

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE

MANNERS OF THE GREAT

TO GENERAL SOCIETY.

AN ESTIMATE OF THE RELIGION

ON THE

FASHIONABLE WOLRD.

REMARKS ON THE SPEECH OF M. DUPONT.

PREFACE.

It has often occurred to the Author, that it would furnish a fair subject for discussion, to determine whether it argues more vanity when a writer prefixes his name to his book, or when he publishes without it: — whether it implies more self-sufficiency to suppose that his name is of so much value as to attract readers to his work, or to trust so confidently to the merit of the work itself, as to depend on its unassisted strength for making its own way. In short, whether the presumption be greater in thinking better of himself, or of his book; and how the proportion of good opinion can be settled or separated.

This is a dilemma in which the writer of these pages has not seldom been involved, having not unfrequently indulged her vanity, or her humility, whichever it may be called, under both shapes, without being able to ascertain on which side the real difference lies. Nor can she decide which principle predominated in risking these two little works anonymously, near twenty years ago, or in afterwards publishing them, with a name which she had little right to expect could confer importance on any performance.

There is, however, one decided advantage which belongs to the anonymous writer. He is not restrained from the strongest reprehension, and most pointed censure, of existing errors, by the conscious apprehension that his own faults may be brought forward. He is under no fear that his negligences will be opposed to his reproofs. He is not deterred from expatiating on the deficiencies of others, by the fear that the reader may confront his life with his arguments.

Being now called upon by her booksellers to unite these separate pieces into one volume, the Author cannot neglect so fair an occasion of expressing her gratitude for the very favourable reception which they severally experienced in their unacknowledged state, seven large editions of the first of these pieces having been called for in the course of a few months, and the whole third impression having been sold on the morning it was published, serve, among repeated instances of general favour, to increase her regret that the merit of her writings have not borne more proportion to the indulgence with which they have been received.

May she venture to observe, without incurring the charge of over-rating her slight performances, that there is a point of view in which this success reflects no discredit on the public opinion? For, does it not evince that where the obvious aim of a writer is to promote the interests of Christian morals, the effort, however feeble, will be candidly accepted; nor will the deficiencies of the compo-

sition be allowed to defeat the honesty of the intention.

The lapse of years, since the first appearance of these two small pieces, has only served to strengthen the conviction that such topics as they embrace cannot be pressed too closely, or too frequently, though they may be pressed far more ably, on the attention of the great and the gay, — on the consciences of the busy and the opulent.

The awful and unparalleled public events which have occurred since these "Thoughts on the Manners of the Great," and this "Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable," were first addressed to them, seem to furnish no new reason why the standard of Religion which these Tracts presumed to hold up should be lowered, while the strictness of practice which they ventured to suggest should be relaxed. Have we beheld any such additional instances of the stability of greatness, as teach us that it is become more safe than formerly to build on the certainty of earthly prosperity? Have we seen any such new evidences of the permanency of human grandeur, as to induce us, by any fresh conviction of its security, to an increased neglect of the things which are eternal?

So far from it, will even the most careless observer refuse to acknowledge, that if ever there was a period in which the demand for elevating the tone of Christianity, principle, and correct conduct, was more imperious than another, that period is the present?

If this country, which God has signally distin-

guished by preserving it from the almost universal wreck of empire; — which God has signally honoured by rendering it the exclusive asylum for the persecuted, the plundered, and the destitute of all Europe, the sole refuge of a distracted world; — if this country has been singled out from among the nations of the earth, by such pre-eminent favour, should not such a country be anxiously desirous to render itself more worthy of its high destination, in having been preserved itself, and appointed the preserver of others? As it would on the one hand be unreasonable to plead our trials and difficulties as apology for relaxing our moral discipline, it would be unfair in the other to produce it as a motive for diminishing our gratitude. Are we not then loudly called upon to acknowledge the mercy of these providential distinctions, by exhibiting in our improved practice *that* consistency which is the life and spirit, as well as the criterion, of real goodness.

While England is establishing a splendid reputation abroad, by every act of wise and vigorous resistance to the oppressor of mankind, and by every instance of disinterested liberality to the oppressed, should she not be equally anxious to establish a solid glory at home, by sedulously labouring to raise the depressed tone of virtuous practice? Should she not be jealous to evince, that her unexampled generosity to strangers is stimulated by the only pure and noble principle of action? And will not this be most unequivocally

demonstrated by the only infallible test, a proportionable attention to domestic religion?

While Great Britain is exhibiting a glorious energy in the cause of a nation, brave and generous like herself, yet professing an erroneous worship, let her convince that nation that she is actuated in assisting her by the spirit of a religion that is, indeed, *reformed;* a religion which having the love of God for its motive, has consequently for its end charity to mankind without distinction of country or of religion.

We are become conspicuous like a city set on a hill. We are "the observed of all observers." While the eyes of the whole world are fixed upon us, let the whole world perceive that our active services, our warm benevolence to our suffering fellow-creatures, flow from the only principle which can sanctify right conduct, from the only source which can recommend it to the favour of God. Let us prove to them that the religion of the Reformation is not a mere term, a nominal distinction, but an improved practical principle, discovering its superiority by its effects. Let us not let slip the present sublime occasion of illustrating the faith which we profess, by a conduct not derogatory to that high profession.

While we cannot too highly value ourselves on being Britons, let us never forget that we must not rest in it as a mere local distinction. While we justly triumph in our unparalleled constitution let us remember that it is not a mere political distinction, glorious as that is, which must finally

save us. Let us be persuaded that the paramount superiority of our happy country will consist in acting up to the spirit of that religion which it professes. That it is not enough that its spirit is transfused into our laws — it is not enough even that it is taught in its public worship, and secured in its invaluable establishment, but that, if it would operate effectually, it must operate individually; if it would operate on the people, it must operate on their superiors, it must be received into the heart, and exhibited in the life of the rich and the great. By adopting this measure, and only by adopting it, can Christianity be rescued from the anomaly with which its enemies have stigmatised it, — that the practice of Christians does not more uniformly exemplify the doctrines of its Author.

Thanks to the English spirit, we want at this moment of peril no Tyrtœus to awake our valour, for it never slumbers. But we want "the warning voice of him who saw the Apocalypse" to rouse us from our *moral* slumber. We want not to be stimulated to public spirit, but to individual virtue; — not to exertion for others, but to vigilance over ourselves; — not to generosity, but to self-denial, not to patriotism, but to piety.

March, 1809.

THOUGHTS

ON

THE IMPORTANCE

OF

THE MANNERS OF THE GREAT

TO

GENERAL SOCIETY.

" You are the Makers of Manners." — SHAKSPEARE.

THOUGHTS

ON

THE MANNERS OF THE GREAT.

To a large and honourable class of the community, to persons considerable in reputation, important by their condition in life, and commendable for the decency of their general conduct, these slight hints are respectfully addressed. They are not intended as a satire upon vice, or a ridicule upon folly, being written neither for the foolish nor the vicious. The subject is too serious for ridicule; and those to whom it is addressed are too respectable for satire. It is recommended to the consideration of those who, filling the higher ranks in life, are naturally regarded as patterns, by which the manners of the rest of the world are to be fashioned.

The mass of mankind, in most places, and especially in those conditions of life which exempt them from the temptation to shameful vices, is perhaps chiefly composed of what is commonly termed, by the courtesy of the world,

good kind of people; for persons of very flagitious wickedness are almost as rare as those of very eminent piety. To the latter of these, admonition were impertinent; to the former it were superfluous. These remarks, therefore, are principally written with a view to those persons of rank and fortune who live within the restraints of moral obligation; who acknowledge the truth of the Christian religion; and who, if in certain instances they allow themselves in practices not compatible with a strict profession of Christianity, seem to do it rather from habit and want of reflection, than either from disbelief of its doctrines, or contempt of its precepts.

Inconsideration, Fashion, and the World, are three confederates against Virtue, with whom even good kind of people often contrive to live on excellent terms; and the fair reputation which may be obtained by a complaisant conformity to the prevailing practice, and by mere decorum of manners, without a strict attention to religious principle, is a constant source of danger to the rich and great. There is something almost irresistibly seducing in the contagion of general example; hence the necessity of that vigilance, which it is the business of Christianity to quicken by incessant admonition, and which it is the business of the world to lay asleep by the perpetual opiates of ease and pleasure.

A fair reputation is among the laudable ob-

jects of human ambition; yet even this really valuable blessing is sometimes converted into a snare, by inducing a treacherous security as soon as it is obtained; and by leading him who is too anxious about obtaining it to stop short without aiming at a higher motive of action. A fatal indolence is apt to creep in upon the soul when it has once acquired the good opinion of mankind, if the acquisition of that good opinion was the ultimate end of its endeavours. Pursuit is at an end when the object is in possession; for he is not likely to "press forward" who thinks he has already "attained." The love of worldly reputation, and the desire of God's favour, have this specific difference, that in the latter, the possession always augments the desire; and the spiritual mind accounts nothing done while any thing remains undone.

But after all, a fair fame, the support of numbers, and the flattering concurrence of human opinion, is obviously a deceitful dependence; for as every individual must die for himself, and answer for himself, both these imaginary resources will fail just at the moment when they could have been of any use. A good reputation, even without internal piety, would be worth obtaining, if the tribunal of heaven were fashioned after the manner of human courts of judicature. If at the general judgment we were to be tried by a jury of our fellow-mortals, it would be but common prudence to secure their favour at any

price. But as things are, it can stand us in little stead in the great day of decision, it being the consummation of Infinite Goodness not to abandon us to the mercy of each other's sentence, but to reserve us for *his* final judgment who knows every motive of every action; who will make strict inquisition into singleness of heart, and uprightness of intention: in whose eyes the sincere prayer of powerless benevolence will outweigh the most splendid profession, or the most dazzling action.

We cannot but rejoice in every degree of human virtue which operates favourably on society, whatever be the motive, or whoever be the actor; and we should gladly commend every degree of goodness, though it be not exactly squared by our own rules and notions. Even the good actions of such persons as are too much actuated by a regard to appearances are not without their beneficial effects. The righteousness of those who occupy this middle region of morality among us certainly exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees; for they are not only exact in ceremonials, but in many respects fulfil the weightier matters of law and conscience. Like Herod, they often "hear gladly," and "do many things." Yet I am afraid I shall be thought severe in remarking, that, in general, those characters in the New Testament, of whose future condition no very comfortable hope is given, seem to have been taken, not from

the profligate, the abandoned, and the dishonourable, but from that decent class commonly described by the term of *good sort of people;* that mixed kind of character in which virtue appears, if it do not predominate. The young ruler was certainly one of the first of this order; and yet we are left in dark uncertainty as to his final allotment. The rich man who built him barns and storehouses, and only proposed to himself the full enjoyment of that fortune, which we do not hear was unfairly acquired, might have been, for all that appears to the contrary, a *very good sort of man;* at least, if we may judge of him by multitudes who live precisely for the same purposes, and yet enjoy a good degree of credit, and who are rather considered as objects of respect than of censure. His plan, like theirs, was not to oppress or to injure, but "to take his ease, to eat, drink, and be merry."

But the most alarming instance is that of the splendid epicure, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. He committed no enormities that have been transmitted to us; for that he dined well, and dressed well, could hardly incur the bitter penalty of eternal misery. That his expenses were suitable to his station, and his splendour proportioned to his opulence, does not exhibit any objection to his character. Nor are we told that he refused the crumbs which Lazarus

solicited. And yet this man, on an authority which we are not permitted to question, is represented, in a future state, as *lifting up his eyes, being in torments.* His punishment seems to have been the consequence of an irreligious temper, a worldly spirit, a heart corrupted by the softnesses and delights of life. It was not because he was rich, but because he trusted in riches; or, if even he was charitable, his charity wanted that principle which alone could sanctify it. His views terminated here: this world's good, and this world's applause, were the motives and the end of his actions. He forgot God; he was destitute of piety; and the absence of this great and first principle of human actions rendered his best deeds, however they might be admired among men, of no value in the sight of God.

There is no error more common, or more dangerous, than the notion that an unrestrained indulgence of pleasure, and an unbounded gratification of the appetites, is generally attended with a liberal, humane, and merciful temper. Nor is there any opinion more false and more fatal, or which demands to be more steadily controverted, than that libertinism and good nature are natural and necessary associates. For after all that corrupt poets, and more corrupt philosophers, have told us of the blandishments of pleasure, and of its tendency to soften the temper and humanize the affections, it is practically

certain, that nothing hardens the heart like excessive and unbounded luxury; and he who refuses the fewest gratifications to his own voluptuousness will generally be found the least susceptible of tenderness for the wants of others. In one reign the cruelties at Rome bore an exact proportion to the dissoluteness at Capreæ. And in another it is not less notorious, that the Imperial fiddler became more barbarous as he grew more profligate. Prosperity, says the Arabian proverb, fills the heart till it makes it hard; and the most dangerous pits and snares for human virtue are those which are so covered over with the flowers of prosperous fortune, that it requires a cautious foot, and a vigilant eye, to escape them.

Ananias and his prevaricating wife were, perhaps, well esteemed in society; for it was enough to establish a very considerable reputation to sell even part of their possessions for religious purposes: but what an alarm does it sound to hypocrisy, that, instead of being rewarded for what they brought, they were punished for what they kept back! And it is to be feared, that this deceitful pair are not the only one, upon whom a good action, without a pure intention, has drawn down a righteous retribution.

Outward actions are the surest, and, indeed, to human eyes, the only evidences of sincerity, but Christianity is a religion of *motives* and

principles. The Gospel is continually referring to the *heart*, as the source of good; it is to the poor in *spirit*, to the pure in *heart*, that the Divine blessing is annexed. A man may correct many improper practices, and refrain from many immoral actions, from merely human motives; but, though this partial amendment is not without its uses, yet this is only attacking symptoms, and neglecting the mortal disease. But to subdue a worldly temper, to control irregular desires, and to have "a clean heart," is to attack sin in its strong-holds. Totally to *accomplish* this, is, perhaps, beyond the narrow limits of human perfection, the best men being constantly humbled to find, that when they "would do good, evil is present with them;" but to *attempt* it, with an humble reliance on superior aid, is so far from being an extravagant or romantic flight of virtue, that it is but the common duty of every ordinary Christian. And this perfection is not the less real, because it is a point which seems constantly to recede from our approaches, just as the sensible horizon recedes from our natural eye. Our highest attainments, instead of bringing us "to the mark," only teach us that the mark is at a greater distance, by giving us more humbling views of ourselves, and more exalted conceptions of the state after which we are labouring. Though the progress towards perfection may be perpetual in this world, the actual attainment is reserved for a

better. And this restless desire of a happiness which we cannot reach, and this lively idea of a perfection which we cannot attain, are among the many arguments for a future state, which seem to come little short of demonstration. The humble Christian takes refuge under the deep sense of his disappointments and defects, in this consoling hope, "When I awake up after thy likeness I shall be satisfied."

Let me not here be misunderstood as undervaluing the virtues which even worldly men may possess. I am charmed with humanity, generosity, and integrity, in whomsoever they may be found. But one virtue must not intrench upon another. Charity must not supplant faith. If a man be generous, good-natured, and humane, it is impossible not to feel for him the tenderness of a brother; but if, at the same time, he be irreligious, intemperate, or profane, who shall dare to say he is in a safe state? Good humour and generous sentiments will always make a man a pleasant acquaintance; but who shall lower the doctrines of the Gospel, to accommodate them to the conduct of men? Who shall bend a strait rule, to favour a crooked practice? Who shall controvert that authority which has said, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord?*

May I venture to be a little paradoxical; and while so many grave persons are descanting on the mischiefs of vice, may I be permitted to say

a word on the mischiefs of virtue, or, rather, of that shining counterfeit, which, while it wants the specific gravity, has much of the brightness of sterling worth? Never, perhaps, did any age produce more beautiful declamations in praise of virtue than the present; never were more polished periods rounded in honour of humanity. An ancient Pagan would imagine that Astrea had returned to take up her abode in our metropolis; a primitive Christian would conclude, that "righteousness and peace had there met together." But how would they be surprised to find that the obligation to these duties was not always thought binding, not only on the reader but on their eloquent encomiasts themselves. How would they be surprised to find that universal benevolence may subsist with partial injustice, and boundless liberality with sordid selfishness! that a man may seem eager in redressing the injuries of half the globe, without descending to the petty detail of private virtues; and burn with zeal for the good of millions he never saw, while he is spreading vice and ruin through the little circle of his own personal influence!

When the general texture of an irregular life is spangled over with some constitutional pleasing qualities; when gaiety, good humour, and a thoughtless profusion of expense, throw a lustre round the faultiest characters, it is no wonder that common observers are blinded into

admiration; a profuse generosity dazzles *them* more than all the duties of the decalogue. But though it may be a very good electioneering virtue, yet there are many qualities which may obtain popularity among men, which do not tend to secure the favour of God. It is somewhat strange that the extravagance of the great should be the criterion of their goodness with those very people who are themselves the victims to this idol; for the prodigal pays no debts if he can help it: and it is a notorious instance of the danger of these popular virtues, and of the false judgments of men, that in one of the wittiest and most popular comedies * which this country has ever produced, those very passages which exalt liberality and turn justice into ridicule, were nightly applauded with enthusiastic rapture by those deluded tradesmen, whom, perhaps, that very sentiment helped to keep out of their money.

There is another sort of fashionable character, whose false brightness is still more pernicious, by casting a splendour over the most destructive vices. Corrupt manners, ruinous extravagance, and the most fatal passion for play, are sometimes gilded over with many engaging acts of charity, and even a general attention and respect to the ceremonials of religion. But this is degrading the venerable image and superscription of Christianity, by stamping them

* The School for Scandal.

on a baser metal than they were ever intended to impress. The young and gay shelter themselves under such examples, and scruple the less to adopt the bad parts of such mixed characters, when they see that a loose and negligent, not to say immoral, conduct, is so compatible with a religious profession.

But I digress from my intention; for it is not the purpose of this address to take notice of any actions which the common consent of mankind has determined to be wrong: but of such chiefly as are practised by the sober, the decent, and the regular; and to drop a few hints on such less obvious offences as are in general

Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne.

Nor will the bounds which I have prescribed myself allow of my wandering into a wide and general field of observation.

The idea of the present slight performance was suggested by reading the King's late excellent proclamation against irreligion and immorality.* Under the shelter of so high a sanction, it may not be unseasonable to press on the hearts of the better disposed such observances as seem to be generally overlooked, and to remark such offences as commonly elude

* This tract was written soon after the institution of the Society for enforcing the King's proclamation against vice and irreligion.

censure, because they are not commonly thought censurable.

It is obvious to all pious persons, that that branch of the divine law, against which the better kind of people trespass with the least scruple, is the fourth commandment. Many, who would shudder at the violation of the other nine, seem without ceremony to expunge this from the Divine code; but by what authority they do this has never been explained. The Christian legislator does not seem to have abridged the commandments; and there is no subsequent authority so much as pretended to by Protestants.

It is not here intended to take notice of such flagrant offences as lie open to the cognizance of higher tribunals; or to pollute this paper with descanting on the holders of card assemblies on Sundays; the frequenters of taverns and gaming-houses; the printers of Sunday newspapers; the proprietors of Sunday stage-coaches, and others who openly insult the laws of the land; laws which will always be held sacred by good subjects, even were not the law of God antecedent to them.

Many of the order whom I here address are persons of the tenderest humanity, and not only wish well to the interests of virtue, but are favourably disposed to advance the cause of religion; nay, would be extremely startled at not being thought sincerely religious: yet, from inconsideration, want of time, want of self-

examination, want of a just sense of the high requirements of the Divine law, want of suspecting the deceitfulness of the human heart, sometimes allow themselves in inattentions and negligences which materially affect their own safety, and the comfort of others. While an animated spirit of charity seems to be kindled among us: while there is a general disposition to instruct the ignorant, and to reform the vicious; we cannot help regretting that these amiable exertions should be counteracted, in some degree, by practices of a directly opposite tendency; trifling in their appearance, but serious in their effects.

There are still among us petty domestic evils, which seem too inconsiderable to claim redress. There is an aggrieved body of men in our very capital whose spiritual hardships seem scarcely to have been taken into consideration, — I mean the HAIR-DRESSERS, on whom

The Sunday shines no day of rest to them.

Is there not a peculiar degree of unkindness in exercising such cruelty on the souls of men, whose whole lives are employed in embellishing our persons? And is it quite conceivable how a lady's conscience is able to make such nice distinctions, that she would be shocked at the idea of sending for her mantua-maker * or

* It is feared that since these pages were written the scruple of sending for either is much diminished.

milliner, her carpenter or mason, on a Sunday, while she makes no scruple regularly to employ a hair-dresser.

Is it not almost ridiculous to observe the zeal we have for doing good at a distance, while we neglect the little, obvious, every-day, domestic duties, which should seem to solicit our immediate attention? But an action ever so right and praise-worthy, which is only to be periodically performed, at distant intervals, is less burthensome to corrupt nature, than an undeviating attention to such small, constant, right habits as are hostile to our natural indolence, and would be perpetually vexing and disturbing our self-love. The weak heart indulges its infirmity, by allowing itself intermediate omissions, and habitual neglects of duty; reposing itself for safety on regular but remote returns of stated performances. It is less trouble to subscribe to the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts, than to have daily prayers in our own families; and I am persuaded that there are multitudes of well-meaning people, who would gladly contribute to a mission of Christianity to Japan or Otaheite, to whom it never occurred that the hair-dresser, whom they are every Sunday detaining from church, has a soul to be saved; that the law of the land co-operates with the law of God, to forbid their employing him; and that they have no right, either legal or moral, to this portion of his time. The poor

man himself, perhaps, dares not remonstrate, for fear he should be deprived of his employment for the rest of the week. If there were no other objection to a pleasurable Sunday among the great and affluent, methinks this single one might operate: would not a devout heart be unwilling to rob a fellow-creature of his time for devotion, or a humane one of his hour of rest? "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

It is strange that there should be so little consistency in human conduct, that the same persons should gladly contribute to spread the light of Christianity in another hemisphere, while, by their example, they actually obstruct the progress of it at home. But it is, I doubt not, much oftener owing to the imperceptible influence of custom and habit, than to a decided ill-intention. Besides, it may be in morals as it is in optics, the eye and the object may come too close to each other, to answer the end of vision. There are certain faults which press too near our self-love to be even perceptible to us.

The petty mischief of what is called *card money* is so assimilated to our habits, and interwoven with our family arrangements, that even many of the prudent and the virtuous no longer consider it as a worm which is feeding on the vitals of domestic virtue. How many poor youths, after having been trained in a wholesome dread of idleness and gaming, when they are sent

abroad into the world, are astonished to find that part of the wages of the servant is to be paid by his furnishing the implements of diversion for the guests of the master. Thus good servants are a commodity which has long been diminishing by an elaborate system. The more sober the family, the fewer attractions it must necessarily have; for these servants will naturally quit a place, however excellent, where there is no play, for one where there is some; and a family where there is but little, for one where there is much. Thus if the advantage of the dependant is to increase in a direct ratio to the dissipation of his employer, what encouragement is left for valuable servants, or what prospect remains of securing valuable servants for sober-minded families?

It will be said, that so small an evil is scarcely worth insisting on. But a small fault, which is become a part of a system, in time establishes an error into a principle. And that remonstrance which should induce people to abolish one wrong habit, or pluck out one rooted error, however trifling, would be of more real use than the most eloquent declamation against vice in general. To take out only one thorn from a suffering patient is more beneficial to him, than the most elaborate disquisition on the pain he is suffering from the thorns which remain.

It should be held as an eternal truth, that what is morally wrong can never be politically

right. It would be arguing great ignorance of human nature, and exacting a very rigorous degree of virtue from a person of vulgar sentiments, to expect that he should wish well to the interests of sobriety, or heartily desire the decrease of dissipation, while the growth of it is made so profitable to himself. It is requiring too much to make the temptation so forcible where the power of resistance is so weak. To hold out to a poor fellow the strong seduction of interest, and yet to expect he will retain the same inflexible principle, is to expect from an illiterate servant an elevation of virtue, which has not always been found even in statesmen and ministers.

It is not here intended to enter into any animadversion on the subject of play itself. But may we not ask, without offence, if it be perfectly right to introduce any money arising from or connected with it, into a part of regular family economy? Is it not giving an air of system to diversion, which does not seem entirely of a piece with the other orderly practices of many discreet families where this odd traffic is carried on? Would not our ancestors, who seem to have understood economy and magnificence too, at least as well as their descendants, have been scandalized, had it been proposed to them to incorporate play so intimately with the texture of their domestic arrangements, as that it should make part of their plan? And would

they have thought it a very dignified practice not to have paid themselves for the amusements of their own houses, but to have invited their friends to an entertainment of which the guests were to defray part of the expense?

Let me suppose a case: what appearance would it have if every gentleman who has partaken of the social entertainment of a friend's table, were, after dinner, expected by the butler to leave a piece of money under his plate to pay for his wine? Do not common sense, hospitality, friendship, and liberal feelings revolt at the bare suggestion of such a project? Yet there is in effect as little hospitality, as little friendship, and as little liberality, in being obliged to pay for the cards as for the wine; both equally making a part of the entertainment.

It is hardly too ludicrous to add, that, seeing how this point has been carried in favour of the groom of the chambers (and it descends down to the lowest footman), we need not despair of seeing the butler insist on being allowed to furnish the wine, for which he shall compel the guests to pay with the same high interest with which they now pay for the cards. It will seem odd at first, but afterwards we shall think no more about it, to see him, during dinner, noting down those who drink the more costly wines, that they may be taxed double. And it will sound whimsical *at first* to hear the butler give his master notice that he must quit his place,

because the company have drunk little wine. This only sounds ridiculous, while the leaving a place through deficiency of card-money sounds reasonable, because we are accustomed to the one, and the other is not yet become fashionable.

The extinction of this favourite perquisite would at first be considered as a violent innovation. All reformations seem formidable before they are attempted. The custom of *vails*, "which gave corruption *broader* wings to fly," was supposed to be invincible. Yet how soon did a general concurrence exterminate it! Had any one foretold twenty years ago, that in a very short space near half a million of pilfering, swearing, sabbath-breaking children should be rescued from the streets, and brought into habits of sobriety and virtue, should we not have laughed to scorn the spiritual Hercules who would have undertaken that the cleansing stream of religious instruction should thus be poured through the Augean stable of ignorance and vice, and in some measure wash away its grossest impurities?

The servant would probably complain of the annihilation of this gainful custom; but the master would find his account in indemnifying the loss; for he, in his turn, would be released from the preposterous contribution to the wages of other men's servants. If, in a family of overgrown dissipation, the stated addition should not

be found equivalent to the relinquished perquisite, the servant must heroically submit to the disadvantageous commutation for the public good. And, after all, it would be no very serious grievance if his reduced income should not then exceed that of the chaplain. It will still at least exceed that of many a deserving gentleman, bred to liberal learning, whose feelings that learning has refined to a painful acuteness, and who is withering away in hopeless penury, with a large family, on a curacy, but little surpassing the wages of a livery servant.

The same principle in human nature by which the nabob, the contractor, and others, by a sudden influx of unaccustomed wealth, become voluptuous, extravagant, and insolent, seldom fails to produce the same effect on persons in these humbler stations, when raised from inferior places to the sudden affluence of these gainful ones. Increased profligacy on a sudden swell of fortune is commonly followed by desperate methods to improve the circumstances, when impaired by the improvidence attending unaccustomed prosperity.

There is another domestic practice which it is almost idle to mention, because it is so difficult to redress, since, such is the present state of society, that even the conscientious think themselves obliged to concur in it. That ingenuity which could devise some effectual substitute for the daily and hourly lie of *Not at home*,

would deserve well of society. Why will not some of those illustrious ladies who lead in the fashionable world invent some phrase which shall equally rescue from destruction the time of the master and the veracity of the servant? Some new and appropriate expression, the not adopting which should be branded with the stigma of vulgarity, might accomplish that which the charge of its being immoral has failed to accomplish.

The expediency of the denial itself no one will dispute, who has a just idea of the value of time. Some scrupulous persons so very much dispute the lawfulness of making their servant's tongue the medium of any kind of falsehood, as to make it a point of conscience rather to lay themselves open to the irruption of every idle invader who sallies out on morning visits, bent on the destruction of business and the annihilation of study. People of very strict integrity lament that this practice induces a general spirit of lying, mixes itself with the habit, and by a quality, the reverse of an alterative, gradually undermines the moral constitution. Others, on the contrary, assert that this is one of those lies of convention no more intended to deceive than the *dear sir* at the beginning, or your *humble servant* at the close, of a letter to a person who is not dear to you, and to whom you owe no subjection. There is, however, this very material difference, that if the first be a falsehood,

you do not convey it by proxy: you use it yourself, and you use it to one who sets no more value on your words than you intended he should; and who shows you he does not, by using the same stated phrase in return, in addressing you, for whom he cares as little. Here the words pass for no more than they are worth.

The ill effects of the custom we are lamenting may be traced in marking the gradual initiation of an unpractised country servant; and who has not felt for his virtuous distress when he has been ordered to call back a more favoured visitant, whom he had just sent away with the assurance that his lady was not at home? Who has not seen his suppressed indignation at being obliged to become himself the detector of that falsehood of which he had been before the instrument? But a little practice, and a repetition of reproof for even daring to *look* honest, soon cures this fault, especially as he is sure to be commended in proportion to the increased firmness of his voice, and the improved steadiness of his countenance.

If this evil, petty as it may seem to be, be really without a remedy; if the state of society be such that it cannot be redressed, let us not be so unreasonable as to expect that a servant will equivocate in small instances and not in great ones. To hope that he will always lie for your convenience, and never for his own, is,

perhaps, expecting more from human nature in a low and uncultivated state than we have any right to expect. Nor should the master look for undeviating and perfect rectitude from his servant, in whom the principle of veracity is daily and hourly weakened in conformity to his own command.

Let us bring home the case to ourselves, the only fair way of determining in all cases of conscience. Suppose that we had established it into a system to allow ourselves regularly to lie on one certain given subject every day, and every hour in the day; while we continue to value ourselves on the most undeviating adherence to truth on every other point. Who shall say that, at the end of one year's tolerated and systematic lying, on this individual subject, we should continue to look upon falsehood in general with the same abhorrence we did when we first entered upon this partial exercise of it.

There is an evil newly crept into polished society, and it comes under a mask so specious, that they who are allured by it come not seldom under the description of *Good sort of people.* I allude to SUNDAY-CONCERTS. Many who would be startled at a profane, or even a light amusement, allow themselves to fancy that the name of *sacred music* sanctifies the diversion. But, if those more favoured beings whom Providence enables to live in ease and affluence, do not make these petty renunciations of their own

way, and their own pleasure, what criterion have we by which to judge of their sincerity? For, as the goodness of Providence has exempted them from painful occupations, they have neither labour from which to rest, nor business from which to refrain. A little abstinence from pleasure is the only valid evidence they have to give of their obedience to the divine precept.

I know with what indignant scorn this remark will, by many, be received; I know that much will be advanced in favour of the sanctity of this amusement. I shall be told that the words are, many of them, extracted from the Bible, and that the composition is the divine Handel's. But were the angel Gabriel the poet, the archangel Michael the composer, and the song of the Lamb the subject, it would not abrogate that statute of the Most High, which has said, "Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath day, and thy SERVANT, and thy CATTLE, shall do no manner of work." I am persuaded that the hallelujahs of heaven would make no moral music to the ear of a conscientious person, while he reflected that multitudes of servants are, through his means, waiting in the street, exposed to every temptation; engaged, perhaps, in profane swearing, and idle, if not dissolute, conversation; and the very cattle are deprived of that rest which the tender mercy of God was graciously pleased, by an astonishing condescension, to include in the commandment.

But I will, for the sake of argument, so far concede as to allow of the innocence and even piety of Sunday-concerts: I will suppose (what, however, does not often happen) that no unhallowed strains are ever introduced; I will admit that some attend these concerts with a view to cultivate devout affections; that they cherish the serious impressions excited by the music, and retire in such a frame of spirit as convinces them that the heart was touched while the ear was gratified; nay, I *would* grant, if such a concession would be accepted, that the intervals were filled up with conversation, "whereby one may edify another." Yet all these good effects, allowing them really to have been produced, will not remove the invincible objection of an EVIL EXAMPLE; and what liberal spirit would refuse any reasonable sacrifice of its own pleasure to so important a motive? Your servants have been accustomed to consider a concert as a secular diversion; if you, therefore, continue it on a Sunday, will not they also expect to be indulged on that day with their common amusements? Saint Paul, who was a very liberal thinker, believed it prudent to make frequent sacrifices of things indifferent in themselves. He was willing to deny himself a harmless and lawful gratification, *even as long as the world stood*, rather than shock the tender consciences of men of less understanding. Where a practice is neither good nor evil in itself, it is both discreet and

generous to avoid it, if it can be attended with any possible danger to minds less enlightened, and to faith less confirmed.

But, religion apart, I have sometimes wondered that people do not yield to the temptation that is held out to them, of abstaining from diversions one day in seven, upon motives of mere human policy; as voluptuaries sometimes fast, to give a keener relish to the delights of the next repast; for pleasure, like an over-fed lamp, is extinguished by the excess of its own aliment; not to say that the instrument of our gratification is often converted into our bane. Anacreon was choked by a grape-stone. The lovers of pleasure are not always prudent, even upon their own principles; for I am persuaded that this world would afford much more real satisfaction than it does, if we did not press, and torture, and strain it, in order to make it yield what it does not contain. Much good, and much pleasure, it does liberally bestow; but no labour or art can extract from it that elixir of peace, that divine essence of content, which it is not in its nature to produce. There is good sense in searching into every blessing for its *hidden* properties; but it is folly to ransack and plunder it for such properties as the experience of all ages tells us are *foreign* to it. We exhaust the world of its pleasures, and then lament that it is empty; we wring those pleasures to the very dregs, and then complain that they are vapid.

We erroneously seek in the world for that peace which we are repeatedly told is not to be found in it. While we neglect to seek it in *Him* who has expressly told us that *our* happiness depends on *his* having "overcome the world." "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as *the world giveth give I unto you.*"

I shall, probably, be accused of a very narrow and fanatical spirit, in animadverting on a practice so little suspected of harm as the frequenting of public walks and gardens on a Sunday; and, certainly, there cannot be an amusement more entirely harmless in itself. But I must appeal to the honest testimony of our own hearts, if the *effect* be favourable to seriousness. Do we commonly retire from these places with the impressions which were made on us at church, in their full force? We entered these sprightly scenes, perhaps, with a strong remaining tincture of that devout spirit which the public worship had infused into the mind; but have we not felt it gradually diminish? Have not our powers of resistance grown insensibly weaker? Has not the gaiety of the scene converted, as it were, argument into illusion? The doctrines which, in the morning, appeared the sober dictates of reason, now seem reasonably rigid; and truths, which were then thought incontrovertible, now appear impertinent. To answer objections is much easier than to withstand allurements. The understanding may controvert a startling proposition with less

difficulty than the sliding heart can resist the infection of seducing gaiety. To oppose a cold and speculative faith to the enchantment of present pleasure, is to fight with inadequate weapons; it is resisting arms with rules; it is combating a temptation with an idea. Whereas, he who engages in the Christian warfare, will find that his chief strength consists in knowing that he is very weak; his progress will depend on his conviction that he is every hour liable to go back; his success, on the persuasion of his fallibility; his safety, on the assurance that to retreat from danger is his highest glory, and to decline the combat his truest courage.

Whatever indisposes the mind for the duty of any particular season, though it assume ever so innocent a form, cannot be perfectly right. If the heart be laid open to the incursion of vain imaginations and worldly thoughts, it matters little by what gate the enemy entered. If the effect be injurious, the cause cannot be quite harmless. It is the perfidious property of certain pleasures, that, though they seem not to have the smallest harm in themselves, they imperceptibly indispose the mind to every thing that is good.

Many readers will be apt to produce against all this preciseness, that hackneyed remark which one is tired of hearing, that Sunday diversions are allowed publicly in many foreign countries, as well in those professing the reformed religion,

as popery. But the corruptions of one part of the Protestant world are no reasonable justification of the evil practices of another. Error and infirmity can never be proper objects of imitation. It is still a remnant of the old leaven; and as to pleading the practice of Roman Catholic countries, one blushes to hear an enlightened Protestant justifying himself by examples drawn from that benighted religion, whose sanctions he would in any other instance be ashamed to plead.

Besides, though I am far from vindicating the amusements permitted on Sundays in foreign countries, by allowing that established custom and long prescription have the privilege of conferring right, yet foreigners may, at least, plead the sanction of custom, and the connivance of the law; while, in this country, the law of the land, and the established usage, concurring with still higher motives, give a sort of venerable sanction to religious observances, the breach of which will be always more liable to misconstruction than in countries where so many motives do not concur in its support.

I do not assert that all those who neglect a strict observation of the Lord's day are remiss in the performance of all their other duties; though they ought to bear in mind that the observance of their other duties is no atonement for the neglect of this; I will however venture to affirm, that all whom I have remarked con-

to observe this day from right motives, have been uniformly attentive to their general conduct. It has been the opinion of many wise and good men *, that Christianity will stand or fall as this day is neglected or observed. Sunday seems to be a kind of Christian Palladium; and the city of God will never be totally taken by the enemy till the observance of that be quite lost. Every sincere soldier of the great Captain of our salvation must, therefore, exert himself in its defence, as ever he would preserve the Divine fort of Revelation against the confederated attacks of the world and the devil.

I shall proceed to enumerate a few of the many causes which seem to impede well-disposed people in the progress of religion. None, perhaps, contributes more to it than that cold, prudential caution against the folly of aiming at *perfection*, so frequent in the mouths of the

* The testimony of one lawyer will, perhaps, be less suspected than that of many priests. "I have ever found," says the great Lord Chief Justice Hale, "by a strict and diligent observation, that a due observance of the duty of Sunday has ever had joined to it a blessing upon the rest of my time; and the week that has been so begun has been blessed and prosperous to me: and, on the other side, when I have been negligent of the duties of this day, the rest of the week has been unsuccessful and unhappy to my own secular employments. So that I could easily make an estimate of my successes the week following, by the manner of my passing this day. AND I DO NOT WRITE THIS LIGHTLY, BUT BY LONG AND SOUND EXPERIENCE."

Sir Matthew Hale's Works.

worldly wise. "We must take the world," say they, "as we find it; reformation is not our business, and we are commanded not to be righteous over-much." A text, by the way, entirely misunderstood and perverted by people of this sort. But these admonitions are contrary to every maxim in human affairs. In arts and letters *, the most consummate models are held out to imitation. We never hear any body cautioned against becoming too wise, too learned, or too rich. Activity in business is accounted commendable; in friendship it is amiable; in ambition it is laudable. The highest exertions of industry are commended; the finest energies of genius are admired. In all the perishing concerns of earthly things, zeal is extolled as exhibiting marks of a sprightly temper and a vigorous mind. Strange! that to be "fervent in spirit," should only be dishonourable in that single instance which should seem to demand unremitting diligence, and unextinguishable warmth.

But, after all, *is* an excessive and intemperate zeal the *common* vice of the times? Is there any

* When Pliny the younger was accused of despising the degenerate eloquence of his own age, and of the vanity of aspiring at perfection in oratory, and of endeavouring to become the rival of Cicero; instead of denying the charge, he exclaimed with a noble spirit, "I think it the height of folly not always to propose to myself the most perfect object of imitation."

very imminent danger that the enthusiasm of the great should transport them to dangerous and inconvenient excesses? Are our young men of fashion so *very* much led away by the fervours of piety, that they require to have their imaginations tamed, and their ardours cooled by the freezing maxims of worldly wisdom? Is the spirit of the age so *very* much inclined to catch and to communicate the fire of devotion as to require to be damped by admonition, or extinguished by ridicule? When the inimitable Cervantes attacked the wild notions and romantic ideas which misled the age in which he lived, he did wisely, because he combated an actually existing evil; but, in this latter end of the eighteenth century, there seems to be little more occasion, among persons of rank I mean, of cautions against enthusiasm than against chivalry; and he who declaims against religious excesses in the company of well-bred people shows himself to be as little acquainted with the manners of the times in which he lives, as he would do who should think it a point of duty to write another Don Quixote.

Among the devices dangerous to our moral safety, certain favourite and specious maxims are not the least successful, as they carry with them an imposing air of indulgent candour, and always seem to be on the popular side of good nature. One of the most obvious of these is, that method of reconciling the conscience to

practices not decidedly wicked, and yet not scrupulously right, by the qualifying phrase, *that there is no harm in it.* I am mistaken if more innocent persons do not inflame their spiritual reckoning by this treacherous apology than by almost any other means. Few are systematically or premeditatedly wicked; or propose to themselves, at first, more than such small indulgences as they are persuaded *have no harm in them.* But this latitude is gradually and imperceptibly enlarged. As the expression is vague and indeterminate; as the darkest shade of virtue, and the lightest shade of vice, melt into no very incongruous colouring; as the bounds between good and evil are not always so precisely defined but that he who ventures to the confines of the one will find himself on the borders of the other; every one furnishes his own definition; every one extends the supposed limits a little further; till the bounds which fence in permitted from unlawful pleasures are gradually broken down, and the marks which separated them imperceptibly destroyed.

It is, perhaps, one of the most alarming symptoms of the degeneracy of morals in the present day, that the distinctions of right and wrong are almost swept away in polite conversation. The most grave offences are often named with cool indifference; the most shameful profligacy with affected tenderness and indulgent toleration. The substitution of the word *gallantry* for that

crime which stabs domestic happiness and conjugal virtue is one of the most dangerous of all the modern abuses of language. Atrocious deeds should never be called by gentle names. This must certainly contribute, more than any thing, to diminish the horror of vice in the rising generation. That our passions should be too often engaged on the side of error, we may look for the cause, though not for the vindication, in the unresisted propensities of our constitution: but that our *reason* should ever be exerted in its favour, that our *conversation* should ever be taught to palliate it, that our *judgment* should ever look on it with indifference, that our tongues should ever be employed to confound the eternal distinctions of right and wrong; this has no shadow of excuse: because this can pretend to no foundation in nature, no apology in temptation, no palliative in passion.

However defective, therefore, our practice may be; however we may be allured by seduction, or precipitated by passion, let us beware of lowering the STANDARD of RIGHT. This induces an imperceptible corruption into the heart, stagnates the noblest principles of action, irrecoverably debases the sense of moral and religious obligation, and prevents us from living up to the height of our nature, because it prevents us from knowing its possible elevation. It cuts off all communication with virtue, and

almost prevents the possibility of a return to it. If we do not rise as high as we aim, we shall rise the higher for having aimed at a lofty mark: but where the RULE is low, the practice cannot be high, though the converse of the proposition is not proportionably true.

Nothing more benumbs the exertions of ardent youthful virtue than the cruel sneer which worldly prudence bestows on active goodness, and the cool derision it expresses at the defeat of a benevolent scheme, of which malice, rather than penetration, had foreseen the failure. Alas! there is little need of any such discouragements. The world is a climate which too naturally chills a glowing generosity, and contracts an expanded heart. The zeal of the most sanguine is but too apt to cool, and the activity of the most diligent to slacken of itself; and the disappointments which Benevolence encounters in the failure of her best-concerted projects, and the frequent depravity of the most chosen objects of her bounty, would soon dry up the amplest streams of charity, were they not fed by the living fountain of religious principle.

I cannot dismiss this part of my subject without animadverting on the too prompt alacrity, even of worthy people, to disseminate, in public and general conversation, instances of their unsuccessful attempts to do good. I never hear a charity story begun to be related in

mixed company, that I do not tremble for the catastrophe, lest it should exhibit some mortifying disappointment, which may deter the inexperienced from running any generous hazards, by exciting harsh suspicions, at an age, when it is less dishonourable to meet with a few casual hurts, and transient injuries, than to go cased in the cumbersome and impenetable armour of distrust. The liberal should be particularly cautious how they furnish the avaricious with creditable pretences for saving their money, since all the instances of the mortifications the humane meet with are carefully treasured up, and added to the armory of the covetous man's arguments, and never fail to be produced by him as defensive weapons, upon every fresh attack on his heart or his purse.

But I am willing to hope that that uncharitableness, which we so often meet with in persons of advanced years, is not always the effect of a heart naturally hard. Misanthropy is very often nothing but abused sensibility. Long habits of the world, and a melancholy conviction how little good he has been able to do in it, harden many a tender-hearted person. The milk of human kindness becomes soured by repeated acts of ingratitude. This commonly induces an indifference to the well-being of others, from a hopelessness of adding to the stock of human virtue and human happiness. This uncomfortable disease is very fond of

spreading its own contagion, which is a cruelty to the health of young and uninfected virtue. For this distemper, generated by a too sanguine disposition, and grown chronical from repeated disappointments, from having rated worldly virtue and worldly generosity too highly, there is but one remedy, or rather one prevention; and this is a genuine principle of Christian piety. He who is once convinced that he is to assist his fellow-creatures, because it is the will of God; he who is persuaded that his forgiving his fellow-servant the hundred pence is a condition annexed to the remission of his own ten thousand talents, will soon get above all uneasiness when the consequence does not answer his expectation. He will soon become only anxious to do his duty, humbly committing events to higher hands. Disappointments will then only serve to refine his motives, and purify his virtue. His charity will then become a sacrifice with which God is well pleased: his affections will be more spiritualised, and his devotions more intense. Nothing short of such a courageous piety, growing on the stock of Christian principle, can preserve a heart hackneyed in the world from relaxed diligence or criminal despair.

People in general are not aware of the mischief of judging of the rightness of any action by its prosperity, or of the excellence of any institution by the abuse of it. We must never proportion our exertions to our success, but to

our duty. If every laudible undertaking were to be dropped because it failed in some cases, or was abused in others, there would not be left an alms-house, a charity-school, or an hospital in the land. If every right practice were to be discontinued because it had been found not to be successful in every instance, and if every right principle were rejected because it had not been operative in all cases, this false reasoning, pushed to the extreme, might at last be brought as an argument for shutting up our churches, and burning our Bibles.

But if, on the one hand, there is a proud and arrogant discretion which ridicules, as Utopian and romantic, every generous project of the active and the liberal; so there is, on the other, a sort of popular bounty which arrogates to itself the exclusive name of *feeling*, and rejects with disdain the influence of a higher principle. I am far from intending to depreciate this humane and exquisitely tender sentiment, which the beneficent Author of our nature gave us, as a stimulus to remove the distresses of others, in order to get rid of our own uneasiness. I would only observe, that where not strengthened by superior motives, it is a casual and precarious instrument of good, and ceases to operate, except in the immediate presence, and within the audible cry, of misery. This sort of feeling forgets that any calamity exists which is out of its own sight; and though

it would empty its purse for such an occasional object as rouses transient sensibility, yet it seldom makes any stated provision for miseries, which are not the less real because they do not obtrude upon the sight, and awaken the tenderness of immediate sympathy. This is a mechanical charity, which requires springs and wheels to set it agoing; whereas, real Christian charity does not wait to be acted upon by impressions and impulses.

Another cause, which very much intimidates well-disposed people, is their terror, lest the character of piety should derogate from their reputation as men of sense. Every man of the world naturally arrogates to himself the superiority of understanding over every religious man. He, therefore, who has been accustomed to set a high value on his intellectual powers must have made very considerable advances in piety before he can acquire a magnanimous indifference to this usurped superiority of another; before he can submit to the parsimonious allotment of wit and learning, which is assigned him by the supercilious hand of worldly wisdom. But this attack upon his pride will be no bad touchstone of his sincerity. If his advances have not been so considerable, then, by an hypocrisy of the least common kind, he will be industrious to appear less good than he really is, lest the detection of his serious propensities should draw on him the imputation of ordinary

parts or low attainments. But the danger is, that while he is too sedulously intent on maintaining his pretensions as an ingenious man, his claims to piety should daily become weaker. That which is long suppressed is too frequently extinguished.

Nothing, perhaps, more plainly discovers the faint impression which religion has really made upon our hearts, than this disinclination, even of good people, to serious conversation. Let me not be misunderstood; I do not mean the wrangle of debate; I do not mean the gall of controversy; I do not mean the fiery strife of *opinions*, than which nothing can be less favourable to good nature, good manners, or good society. But it were to be wished, that it was not thought ill-bred and indiscreet that the escapes of the tongue should now and then betray the "abundance of the heart:" that when such subjects are casually introduced, a discouraging coldness did not instantly take place of that sprightly animation of countenance which made common topics interesting. If these "outward and visible signs" were unequivocal, we should form but moderate ideas of the "inward and spiritual grace." It were to be wished, that such subjects were not thought dull *merely* because they are good; it were to be wished, that they had the common chance of fair discussion; and that parts and learning were not ashamed to exert themselves on occasions where both

might appear to so much advantage. If the heart were really interested, could the affections forbear now and then to break out into language? Artists, physicians, merchants, lawyers, and scholars, keep up the spirit of their professions by mutual intercourse. New lights are struck out, improvements are suggested, emulation is kindled, love of the object is inflamed, mistakes of the judgment are rectified, and desire of excellence is excited by communication. And is piety alone so very easy of acquisition, so very natural to our corrupt hearts, as to require none of the helps which are indispensable on all other subjects? Travellers, who are to visit any particular country, are full of earnest enquiry, and diligent research: they think nothing indifferent by which their future pleasure or advantage may be affected. Every hint which may procure them any information, or caution them against any danger, is thankfully received; and all this, because they are really in *earnest* in their preparation for this journey; and do fully *believe*, not only that there is such a country, but that they themselves have a personal individual interest in the good, or evil, which may be found in it.

A further danger to *good kind of people* seems to arise from a mistaken idea, that only great and actual sins are to be guarded against. Whereas, in effect, temptations to the grosser sins do not so frequently occur to those who are

hedged in by the blessings of affluence, by a regard to reputation and the care of health; while sins of omission make up, perhaps, the most formidable part of *their* catalogue of offences. These generally supply in number what they want in weight, and are the more dangerous for being little ostensible. They continue to be repeated with less regret, because the remembrance of their predecessors does not, like the remembrance of formal, actual crimes, assume a body and a shape, and terrify by the impression of particular scenes and circumstances. While the memory of transacted evil haunts a tender conscience, by perpetual apparition; omitted duty, having no local or personal existence, not being recorded by standing acts, and deeds, and dates, and having no distinct image to which the mind may recur, sinks into quiet oblivion, without deeply wounding the conscience, or tormenting the imagination. These omissions were, perhaps, among the "secret sins" from which the royal penitent so earnestly desired to be cleansed; and it is worthy of the most serious consideration, that these are the offences against which the Gospel pronounces some of its very alarming denunciations. It is not less against negative than against actual evil, that affectionate exhortation, lively remonstrance, and pointed parable, are exhausted. It is against the tree which bore NO fruit, the lamp which had NO oil, the un-

profitable servant, who made NO use of his talent, that the severe sentence is denounced; as well as against *corrupt* fruit, *bad* oil, and talents *ill* employed. We are led to believe, from the same high authority, that omitted duties, and neglected opportunities, will furnish no inconsiderable portion of our future condemnation. A very awful part of the decision, in the great day of account, seems to be reserved merely for carelessness, omissions, and negatives. Ye gave me NO meat; ye gave me NO drink; ye took me NOT in; ye visited me NOT. On the punishment attending positive crimes, as being more naturally obvious, it was not, perhaps, thought so necessary to insist.

Another cause, which still further impedes the reception of religion even among the well-disposed, is, that garment of sadness in which people delight to suppose her dressed; and that life of hard austerity, and pining abstinence, which they pretend she enjoins her disciples. And it were well if this were only the misrepresentation of her declared enemies; but, unhappily, it is the too frequent misconception of her injudicious friends. But such an overcharged picture is not more unamiable than it is unlike: for I will venture to affirm, that Religion, with all her beautiful and becoming sanctity, imposes fewer sacrifices, not only of rational but of pleasurable enjoyment, than the uncontrolled dominion of any one vice.

Her service is not only safety hereafter, but freedom here. She is not so tyrannising as Appetite, so exacting as the World, nor so despotic as Fashion. Let us try the case by a parallel, and examine it, not as affecting our virtue but our pleasure. Does Religion forbid the cheerful enjoyments of life as rigorously as Avarice forbids them? Does she require such sacrifices of our ease as Ambition, or such re-renunciations of our quiet as Pride? Does Devotion *murder sleep* like Dissipation? Does she destroy Health like Intemperance? Does she annihilate Fortune like Gaming? Does she embitter Life like Discord? or abridge it like Duelling? Does Religion impose more vigilance than Suspicion? or inflict half as many mortifications as Vanity? Vice has her martyrs; and the most austere and self-denying ascetic (who mistakes the genius of Christianity almost as much as her enemies mistake it) never tormented himself with such cruel and causeless severity as that with which Envy lacerates her unhappy votaries. Worldly honour obliges us to be at the trouble of resenting injuries; and worldly prudence obliges us to be at the expense of litigating about them; but Religion spares us the inconvenience of the one and the cost of the other, by the summary command TO FORGIVE; and by this injunction she consults our happiness no less than our virtue; for the torment of constantly hating

any one must be, at least, equal to the sin of it. And resentment is an evil so costly to our peace, that we should find it more cheap to forgive even were it not more right. If this estimate be fairly made, then is the balance clearly on the side of Religion, even in the article of pleasure.

It is an infirmity not uncommon to *good kind of people*, to comfort themselves that they are living in the exercise of some one natural good quality, and to make a religious merit of a constitutional happiness. They have also a strong propensity to separate what God has joined; — belief and practice; the creed and the commandments; actions and motives; moral duty and religious obedience. Whereas, you will hardly find, in all the New Testament, a moral, or a social virtue, that is not hedged in by some religious injunction; scarcely a good action enjoined towards others, but it is connected with some exhortation to personal purity. All the charities of benevolence are, in general, so agreeable to the natural make of the heart, that it is a very tender mercy of God to have made that a duty, which, to finer spirits, would have been irresistible as an inclination; and to have annexed the highest future reward to the greatest present pleasure. But in order to give a religious sanction to a social virtue, the duty of "visiting the fatherless and widow in their affliction," is inseparably attached to the dif-

ficult and self-denying injunction of "keeping ourselves unspotted from the world." This adjunct is the more needful, as many are apt to make a kind of moral commutation, and to allow themselves so much pleasure in exchange for so much charity. But one good quality can never stand proxy for another. The Christian virtues derive their highest lustre from association: they have such a spirit of society, that they are weak and imperfect when solitary; their radiance is brightened by an intermingling of their beams, and their natural strength multiplied by their alliance with each other.

It cannot be denied that *good sort of people* sometimes use religion as the voluptuous use physic. As the latter employ medicine to make health agree with luxury, the former consider religion as a medium to reconcile peace of conscience with a life of pleasure. But no moral chemistry can blend natural contradictions. In all such unnatural mixtures the world will still be uppermost, and religion will disdain to coalesce with its antipathy.

Let me not be suspected of intending to insinuate that religion encourages men to fly from society, and hide themselves in solitudes: to renounce the generous and important duties of active life, for the visionary, cold, and fruitless virtues of an hermitage, or a cloister. No: the mischief arises not from our living in the world, but from the world living in us; oc-

cupying our hearts, and monopolising our affections. Action is the life of virtue, and the world is the theatre of action. Perhaps some of the most perfect patterns of human conduct may be found in the most public stations, and among the busiest orders of mankind. It is, indeed, a scene of trial, but the glory of the triumph is proportioned to the peril of the conflict. A sense of danger quickens circumspection, and makes virtue more vigilant. Lot, perhaps, is not the only character who maintained his integrity in a great city, proverbially wicked, and forfeited it in the bosom of retirement.

It has been said that worldly *good sort of people* are a greater credit to their profession, by exhibiting more cheerfulness, gaiety, and happiness, than are visible in serious Christians. If this assertion be true, which I very much suspect, is it not probable that the apparent ease and gaiety of the former may be derived from the same source of consolation which Mrs. Quickly recommends to Falstaff, in Shakspeare's admirable picture of the death-bed scene of that witty profligate? "He wished for comfort, quoth mine hostess, and began to talk of God; now I, to comfort him, begged him he should not think of God: it was time enough to trouble himself with these things." Do not many deceive themselves by drawing water from these dry wells of comfort? and patch up a precarious and imperfect happiness in this world, by divert-

ing their attention from the concerns of the next?

Another obstruction to the growth of piety is that unhappy prejudice which even good kind of people too often entertain against those who differ from them in opinion. Every man who is sincerely in earnest to advance the interests of religion will have acquired such a degree of candour, as to become indifferent by whom good is done, or who has the reputation of doing it, provided it be actually done. He will be anxious to increase the stock of human virtue, and of human happiness, by every possible means. He will whet and sharpen every instrument of goodness, though it be not cast in his own mould, or fashioned after his own pattern. He will never consider whether the form suits his own particular taste, but whether the instrument itself be calculated to accomplish the work of his master.

I shall conclude these loose and immethodical hints with a plain though short address to those who content themselves with a decent profession of the doctrines, and a formal attendance on the offices, instead of a diligent discharge of the duties, of Christianity. Believe, and forgive me! — YOU are the people who lower religion in the eyes of its enemies. The openly profane, the avowed enemies to God and goodness, serve to confirm the truths they mean to oppose, to illustrate the doctrines they deny, and to accom-

plish the very predictions they affect to disbelieve. But you, like an inadequate and faithless prop, overturn the edifice which you pretend to support. When an acute and keen-eyed infidel measures your lives with the rule by which you profess to walk, he finds so little analogy between them, the copy is so unlike the pattern, that this inconsistency of yours is the pass through which his most dangerous attack is made. And I must confess, that, of all the arguments, which the malignant industry of infidelity has been able to muster, the negligent conduct of professing Christians seems to me to be the only one which is really capable of staggering a man of sense. He hears of a spiritual and self-denying religion; he reads the beatitudes; he observes that the grand artillery of the Gospel is planted against pride and sensuality. He then turns to the transcript of this perfect original; to the lives which pretend to be fashioned by it. There he sees, with triumphant derision, that pride, self-love, luxury, self-sufficiency, unbounded personal expense, and an inordinate appetite for pleasure, are reputable vices in the eyes of many of those who acknowledge the truth of the Christian doctrines. He weighs that meekness to which a blessing is promised, with that arrogance which is too common to be very dishonourable. He compares that non-conformity to the world, which the Bible makes the criterion of a be-

liever, with that rage for amusement which is not considered as disreputable in a Christian. He opposes the self-denying and lowly character of the Author of our faith with the sensual practices of his followers. He finds little resemblance between the restraints prescribed and the gratifications indulged in. What conclusions must a speculative reasoning sceptic draw from such premises? Is it any wonder that such phrases as "a broken spirit," a "contrite heart," "poverty of spirit," "refraining the soul," "keeping it low," and "casting down high imaginations," should be to the unbeliever "foolishness," when such humiliating doctrines are a "stumbling block" to professing Christians; to Christians who cannot cordially relish a religion which professedly tells them it was sent to stain the pride of human glory, and "to exclude boasting?"

But though the passive and self-denying virtues are not high in the esteem of mere good sort of people, yet they are peculiarly the evangelical virtues. The world extols brilliant actions; the Gospel enjoins good habits and right motives; it seldom inculcates those splendid deeds which make heroes, or teaches those lofty sentiments which constitute philosophers; but it enjoins the harder task of renouncing self, of living uncorrupted in the world, of subduing besetting sins, and of "not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought." The *acquisition*

of glory was the precept of other religions, the *contempt* of it is the perfection of Christianity.

Let us, then, be consistent, and we shall never be contemptible, even in the eyes of our enemies. Let not the unbeliever say that we have one set of opinions for our theory, and another for our practice; that to the vulgar

> We show the rough and thorny way to heav'n,
> While we the primrose path of dalliance tread.

Would it not become the character of a man of sense, of which consistency is a most unequivocal proof, to choose some rule and abide by it? An extempore Christian is a ridiculous character. Fixed principles, if they be really principles of the heart, and not merely opinions of the understanding, will be followed by a consistent course of action; while indecision of spirit will produce instability of conduct. If there be a model which we profess to admire, let us square our lives by it. If either the Koran of Mahomet, or the Revelations of Zoroaster, be a perfect guide, let us follow one of them. If either Epicurus, Zeno, or Confucius, be the peculiar object of our veneration and respect, let us avowedly fashion our conduct by the dictates of their philosophy; and then, though we may be wrong, we shall not be absurd; we may be erroneous, but we shall not be inconsistent: but if the Bible be in truth the word of God, as we profess to believe, we need look no further

for a consummate pattern. "If the Lord be God, let us follow HIM:" if Christ be a sacrifice for sin, let Him be also to us the example of an holy life.

But I am willing to flatter myself that the moral and intellectual scene about us begins to brighten. I indulge myself in moments of the most enthusiastic and delightful vision, that things are beginning gradually to lead to the fulfilment of that promise, that "all the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ." I take encouragement that that glorious prophecy, that "of the increase of his government there shall be no end," seems to be gradually accomplishing; and in no instance more, perhaps, than in the noble attempt about to be made for the abolition of the African Slave-trade*: for what event can human wisdom foresee more likely to contribute to "give the SON the Heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession," than the success of such an enterprise, which will restore the lustre of the British name, and cut off, at a single stroke, as large and disgraceful a portion of national guilt as ever impaired the virtue, or dishonoured the councils, of a Christian country.

* This interesting question was then beginning to be agitated in parliament; but it was not *then* foreseen that Bible and Missionary Societies would spring up to fill up the measure of these predictions.

A good spirit seems to be at work; a catholic temper is diffusing itself among all sects and parties; an enlightened candour and a liberal toleration were never more prevalent; good men combat each other's opinions with less rancour and better manners *; they hate each other less for those points in which they disagree, and love each other more for those points in which they join issue than they formerly did. We have many public encouragements; we have a pious king; a wise and virtuous minister; very many respectable, and not a few serious, clergy. Their number, I am willing to hope, is daily increasing. Among these, some of the first in dignity are the most exemplary in conduct. An increasing desire to instruct the poor, to inform the ignorant, and to reclaim the vicious, is spreading among us. The late Royal Proclamation affords an honourable sanction to virtuous endeavours, and lends nerves and sinews to the otherwise feeble exertions of individuals, by enforcing laws wisely planned, but hitherto feebly executed. In short, there is a good hope that we shall more and more become "that happy people who have the Lord for their God:" that as prosperity is already within our walls, peace and virtue may abide in our dwellings.

But vain will be all endeavours after *partial* and *subordinate* amendment. Reformation must begin with the GREAT, or it will never be ef-

* This was written before the French Revolution!!!

fectual. *Their* example is the fountain whence the vulgar draw their habits, actions, and characters. To expect to reform the poor, while the opulent are corrupt, is to throw odours into the stream while the springs are poisoned.

If, therefore, the Rich and Great will not, from a liberal spirit of doing right, and from a Christian spirit of fearing God, abstain from those offences, for which the poor are to suffer fines and imprisonments, effectual good cannot be done. It will signify little to lay penalties on the horses of the drover, or on the waggon of the husbandman, while the chariot wheels of the Great roll with incessant motion; and while the sacred day, on which the sons of industry are commanded by royal proclamation to desist from travelling, is for that very reason selected for the journeys of the Great, and preferred, because the road is encumbered with fewer interruptions. But will it not strike every well-meaning Sunday traveller with a generous remorse, when he reflects that he owes the accommodation of an unobstructed road to the very obedience which is paid by others to that divine and human law which he is in the very act of violating?

Will not the common people think it a little inequitable that they are abridged of the diversions of the public-house and the gaming-yard on Sunday evening, when they shall hear that many houses of the first nobility are on that

evening crowded with company, and such amusements carried on as are prohibited by human laws even on common days? As imitation, and a desire of being in the fashion, govern the lower orders of mankind, it is to be feared that they will not think reformation reputable, while they see it *recommended* only, and not *practised*, by their superiors. A precept counteracted by an example is worse than fruitless, it is ridiculous; and the common people will be tempted to set an inferior value on goodness, when they find it is only expected from the lower ranks. They cannot, surely, but smile at the disinterestedness of their superiors, who, while they seem anxiously concerned to save others, are so little solicitous about their own state. The ambitious vulgar will hardly relish a salvation which is only intended for plebeians; nor will they be apt to entertain very exalted notions of that promised future reward, the road to which they perceive their betters are so much more earnest to point out to *them* than to walk in themselves.

It was not by inflicting pains and penalties that Christianity first made its way into the world: the divine truths it inculcated received irresistible confirmation from the LIVES, PRACTICES, and EXAMPLES of its venerable professors. These were arguments which no popular prejudice could resist, no Jewish logic refute, and no pagan persecution discredit. Had the primitive Christians only *praised and promulgated* the most

perfect religion the world ever saw, it would have produced but very slender effects on the faith and manners of the people. The astonishing consequences which followed the pure doctrines of the Gospel would never have been produced, if the jealous and inquisitive eye of malice could have detected that the DOCTRINES the Christians recommended had not been illustrated by the LIVES they led.

POSTSCRIPT

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE public favour having already brought this little Essay to another edition, the Author has been sedulous to discover any particular objections that have been made to it. Since the preceding sheets were printed off, it has been suggested by some very respectable persons who have honoured this slight performance with their notice, that it inculcates a too rigid austerity, and carries the point of observing Sunday much too far; that it takes away all the usual occupations of the day, without substituting any others in their stead; and that it only pulls down a wrong system, without so much as attempting to build up a right one. To these observations the Author begs leave to reply, that whilst animadverting on error, the insisting on obvious duty was purposely omitted. To tell people what they already know to be right, was less the intention of this address than to observe upon practices which long habit had prevented them from perceiving to be wrong. Sensible and well-

meaning persons can hardly be at a loss on a subject which has exhausted precept and wearied exhortation. To have expatiated on it would only have been to repeat what is already known and acknowledged to be right, even by those whom the hurry of engagements will not allow to take breath one day in a week, that they may run the race of pleasure with more alacrity on the other six. But probably it is not the duties but the amusements appropriated to the day about which the enquiry is made. It will, perhaps, be found, that the intervals of a Sunday, regularly devoted to all its reasonable and obvious employments, are not likely to be so very tedious but that they might be easily and pleasantly filled up by cheerful, innocent, and instructive conversation. Human delights would be very circumscribed, indeed, if the practices here noticed as erroneous included the whole circle of enjoyment. In addition to the appropriate pleasures of devotion, are the pleasures of retirement, the pleasures of friendship, the pleasures of intellect, and the pleasures of beneficence, to be estimated as nothing?

There will not be found, perhaps, a single person who shall honour these pages with a perusal, who has not been repeatedly told, with an air of imposing gravity, by those who produce cards on a Sunday evening, *that it is better to play than to talk scandal.* Before this pithy axiom was invented, it was not, perhaps, suspected that

Sunday gaming would ever be adduced as an argument in favour of morals. Without entering into the comparative excellence of these two occupations, or presuming to determine which has a claim to pre-eminence of piety, may we not venture to be thankful that these alternatives do not seem to empty the whole stock of human resource; but that something will still be left to occupy and to interest those who adopt neither the one nor the other?

People in the gay and elegant scenes of life are perpetually complaining that an extensive acquaintance, and the necessity of being constantly engaged in large circles and mixed assemblies, leaves them little leisure for family enjoyment, select conversation, and domestic delights. Others, with no less earnestness, lament that the hurry of public stations, and the necessary demands of active life, allow them no time for any but frivolous reading. Now, the recurrence of one Sunday in every week seems to hold out an inviting remedy for both these evils. The sweet and delightful pleasures of family society might then be uninterruptedly enjoyed, by the habitual exclusion of trifling and idle visitors, who do not come to see their friends, but to get rid of themselves. Persons of fashion, living in the same house, and connected by the closest ties, whom business and pleasure keep asunder during the greatest part of the week, would then have an opportunity of spending a

little time together, and of cultivating that friendship for each other, that affection for their children, and that intercourse with their Maker, to which the present manners are not *very* favourable. To the other set of complainers, those who can find no time to read, this interval naturally presents itself; and it so happens, that some of the most enlightened men the world ever saw have, not unfrequently, devoted their rare talents to subjects peculiarly suited to this day; and that not merely in the didactic form of sermons, which men of the world affect to disdain, but in every alluring shape which human ingenuity could assume. It can be fortunately produced, among a thousand other instances, that the deepest metaphysician *, the greatest astronomer, the sublimest poet, the acutest reasoner, the politest writer, the most consummate philosopher, and the profoundest investigator of nature, which this, or perhaps any country has produced, have all written on such subjects as are analogous to the business of the Lord's day. Such authors as these, even wits, philosophers, and men of the world, must acknowledge that it is not bigotry to read, nor enthusiasm to commend. Of this illustrious group only *one* was a clergyman, which, to a certain class of readers, will be a strong recommendation to the others; though it is a little hard that the fastidiousness

* Locke, Newton, Milton, Butler, Addison, Bacon, Boyle.

of modern taste should undervalue the learned and pious labours of divines, only because they are *professional.* In every other function, a man's compositions are not the less esteemed because they peculiarly belong to his more immediate business. Blackstone's opinions in jurisprudence are in high reputation, though he was a lawyer. Sydenham is still consulted as oracular in fevers, in spite of his having been a physician; and the Commentaries of Cæsar are of established authority in military operations, notwithstanding he was a soldier.

AN

ESTIMATE

OF THE

RELIGION

OF

THE FASHIONABLE WORLD.

There was never found in any age of the world, either Philosophy, or Sect, or Religion, or Law, or Discipline, which did so highly exalt the public good as the Christian Faith.

LORD BACON.

AN ESTIMATE,

&c. &c.

INTRODUCTION.

THE general design of these pages is to offer some cursory remarks on the present state of religion among a great part of the polite and the fashionable; not only among that description of persons who, whether from disbelief or whatever other cause, avowedly neglect the duties of Christianity; but among that more decent class also, who, while they acknowledge their belief of its truth by a public profession, and are not inattentive to any of its forms, yet exhibit little of its spirit in their general temper and conduct. It is designed to show that Christianity, like its Divine Author, is not only *denied* by those who in so many words disown their submission to its authority, but is *betrayed* by the still more treacherous disciple, even while he cries, *Hail, Master!*

For this visible declension of piety, various reasons have been assigned, some of which, how-

ever, do not seem fully adequate to the effects ascribed to them. The author of a late popular pamphlet * has accounted for the increased profligacy of the *common people*, by ascribing it, very justly, to the increased dissoluteness of their superiors. And who will deny what he further affirms, that the general conduct of high and low receives a deep tincture of depravity from the growing neglect of public worship? So far I most cordially agree with the noble author. Nothing can be more obvious than that the disuse of public worship is naturally followed by a neglect of all religious duties. Energies, which are not called out into action, almost necessarily die in the mind. The soul, no less than the body, requires its stated repairs, and regular renovations; and from the sluggish and procrastinating spirit of man, that religious duty to which no fixed time is assigned is seldom, it is to be feared, performed at all.†

I must, however, take leave to dissent from the opinion of the noble author, that the too common desertion of persons of rank from the service of the establishment is occasioned, in general, as he intimates, by their disapprobation of the Liturgy; as it may more probably be supposed, that the far greater part of them are deterred from going to church by motives widely

* Hints to an Association for preventing Vice and Immorality, written by the Duke of Grafton.

† On this subject see Dr. Johnson's Life of Milton.

removed from speculative objections and conscientious scruples.

It would be quite foreign to my present purpose to enter upon the question of the superior utility of a form of prayer for public worship. Most sincerely attached to the establishment myself, not, as far as I am able to judge, from prejudice, but from a fixed and settled conviction, I regard its institutions with a veneration at once affectionate and rational. Never need a Christian, except when his own heart is strangely indisposed, fail to derive benefit from its ordinances; and he may bless the over-ruling providence of God, that, in this instance, the natural variableness and inconstancy of human opinion is, as it were, fixed, and settled, and hedged in, by a stated service, so pure, so evangelical, and which is enriched by such a large infusion of sacred Scripture.

If so many among us contemn the service as having been, individually, to *us* fruitless and unprofitable, let us enquire whether the blessing may not be withheld because we are not fervent in asking it. If we do not find a suitable humiliation in the *Confession*, a becoming earnestness in the *Petitions*, a congenial joy in the *Adoration*, a corresponding gratitude in the *Thanksgivings*, it is because our hearts do not accompany our words; it is because we rest in "the form of godliness," and are contented to remain destitute of its "power." If we are not

duly interested when the select portions of Scripture are read to us, it is because we do not as "new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby."

Perhaps there has not been since the age of the apostles a church upon earth in which the public worship was so solemn and so cheerful; so simple, yet so sublime; so full of fervour, at the same time so free from enthusiasm; so rich in the gold of Christian antiquity, yet so astonishingly exempt from its dross. That it has imperfections we do not deny, but what are they compared with its general excellence? They are as the spots on the sun's disk, which a sharp observer may detect, but which neither diminish the warmth, nor obscure the brightness.

But if those imperfections, which are inseparable from all human institutions, are to be alleged as reasons for abstaining to attend on the service of the established church, we must, on the same principle, and on still stronger grounds, abstain from all public worship whatever; and indeed it must be confessed, that the persons of whom we are now speaking are very consistent in this matter.

But the difference of opinion here intimated is not so much about the Liturgy itself, as the imaginary effects attributed to it in thinning the pews of our people of fashion. The slightest degree of observation serves to contradict this

assertion. Those, however, who, with the noble author, maintain the other opinion, may satisfy their doubts by enquiring, whether the regular and systematic absentees from church are chiefly to be found among the thinking, the reading, the speculative, and the scrupulous part of mankind.

Even the most negligent attendant on public worship must know, that the obnoxious creed, to whose malignant potency this general desertion is ascribed by the noble author, is never read above three or four Sundays in the year; and even allowing the validity of the objections brought against it, that does not seem a very adequate reason for banishing the most scrupulous and tender consciences from church on the remaining eight-and-forty Sundays of the calendar.

Besides, there is one test which is absolutely unequivocal: this creed is never read at all in the afternoon, any more than the Litany, that other great source of offence and supposed desertion; and yet with all these multiplied reasons for their attendance, do we see the conscientious crowds of the high-born, who abstain from the morning service through their repugnance to subscribe to the dogmas of Athanasius, or the more orthodox clauses of the morning Litany, —do we see them, I say, flocking to the *evening* service, impatient for the exercise of that devotion which had been obstructed by these two

objectionable portions of the Liturgy? Do we see them eager to explain the cause of their morning absence, and zealous to vindicate their piety, by assiduously attending when the reprobated portions are omitted? So far from it, is it not pretty evident that the general quarrel, with some few exceptions, of those who habitually absent themselves from public worship, is not with the Creed, but the Commandments? With such, to reform the Prayer-Book would go but a little way, unless the New Testament could be also abridged. Cut, and pare, and prune the service of the Church ever so much, still Christianity itself will be found full of formidable objections. Should the Church even give up her abstruse creeds, it would avail but little, unless the Bible would also expunge those rigorous laws which not only prohibit sinful actions, but corrupt inclinations. And, to speak honestly, I do not see how such persons as habitually infringe the laws of virtue and sobriety, and who yet are men of acute sagacity, accustomed on other subjects to a consistent train of reasoning; who see consequences in their causes; who behold practical self-denial necessarily involved in the sincere habit of religious observances; — I do not see how, with respect to such men, any doctrines reformed, any redundancies lopped, any obscurities brightened, could effect the object of this author's very benevolent and Christian wish.

Religious duties are often neglected upon more consistent grounds than the friends of religion are willing to allow. They are often discontinued, not as repugnant to the understanding, not as repulsive to the judgment, but as hostile to a licentious life; and when a prudent man, after having entered into a solemn convention, finds that he is living in a constant breach of every article of the treaty he has engaged to observe, one cannot much wonder at his getting out of the hearing of the heavy artillery which he knows is planted against him, and against every one who lives in the allowed infraction of the covenant into which every Christian has entered.

For a man of sense, who should acknowledge the truth of the doctrine, would find himself obliged to submit to the force of the precept. It is not easy to be a comfortable sinner, without trying, at least, to be a confirmed unbeliever; and as that cannot be achieved by a wish, the next expedient is to shun the recollection of that belief, and to forget that of which we cannot be ignorant. The smallest remains of faith would embitter a life of libertinism, and to be frequently reminded of the articles of that faith, would disturb the ease induced by a neglect of all observances. While to him who retains any impression of Christianity, the wildest festivals of intemperance will be converted into the terrifying feast of Damocles.

That many a respectable non-conformist is kept out of the pale of the Establishment by some of the causes noticed by the noble author cannot be questioned; and a matter of regret it is. But these, however, are often sober thinkers, serious enquirers, conscientious reasoners, whose object, we may charitably believe, is truth, however they may be deceived as to its nature: but that the same objections banish the great and the gay is not equally evident. Thanks to the indolence and indifference of the times, it is not dogmas or doctrines, it is not abstract reasonings, or puzzling propositions, it is not perplexed argument, or intricate metaphysics, which can now disincline from Christianity; so far from it, they cannot even allure to unbelief. Infidelity itself, with all that strong and natural bias which selfishness and appetite entertain in its favour, if it appear in the grave and scholastic form of speculation, argument, or philosophical deduction, may lie almost as quietly on the shelf as the volumes of its most able antagonist; and the cobwebs are almost as seldom brushed from Hobbes as from Hooker. No: prudent scepticism has wisely studied the temper of the times, and skilfully felt the pulse of this relaxed, and indolent, and selfish age. It prudently accommodated itself to the reigning character, when it adopted sarcasm instead of reasoning, and preferred a sneer to an argument. It discreetly judged, that, if it would now gain proselytes, it

must show itself under the bewitching form of a profane bon-mot; must be interwoven in the texture of some amusing history, written with the levity of a romance, and the point and glitter of an epigram: it must embellish the ample margin with some offensive anecdote or impure allusion, and decorate impiety with every loose and meretricious ornament which a corrupt imagination can invent. It must break up the old flimsy system into little mischievous aphorisms, ready for practical purposes: it must divide the rope of sand into little portable parcels, which the shallowest wit can comprehend, and the shortest memory carry away.

Philosophy, therefore, (as Unbelief, by a patent of its own creation, has lately been pleased to call itself,) will not do nearly so much mischief to the present age as its primitive apostles intended: since it requires time, application, and patience to peruse the reasoning veterans of the sceptic school; and these are talents not now very severely devoted to study of any sort, by those who give the law to fashion; especially since, as it was hinted above, the same principles may be acquired on cheaper terms, and the reputation of being philosophers obtained without the sacrifices of pleasure for the severities of study; since the industry of our literary chemists has extracted the spirit from the gross substance of the old unvendible poison, and

exhibited it in the volatile essence of a few sprightly sayings.

If, therefore, in this voluptuous age, when a frivolous and relaxing dissipation has infected our very studies, infidelity will not be at the pains of deep research and elaborate investigation, even on such subjects as are congenial to its affections, and promotive of its object; it is vain to expect that Christianity will be more engaging, either as an object of speculation or as a rule of practice; since it demands a still stronger exertion of those energies which the gay world is not at the pains to exercise, even on the side they approve. For the evidences of Christianity require attention to be comprehended, no less than its doctrines require humility to be received, and its precepts self-denial to be obeyed.

Will it, then, be uncharitable to pronounce, that the leading mischief, not which thins our churches (for that is not the evil I propose to consider), but which pervades our whole character, and gives the colour to our general conduct, is *practical irreligion?* an irreligion not so much opposed to a speculative faith, not so much in hostility to the evidences of Christianity, as to that spirit, temper, and behaviour which Christianity inculcates.

On this practical irreligion it is proposed to offer a few hints. After attempting to show, by a comparison with the religion of the great in

preceding ages, that there is a visible decline of piety among the higher ranks, — that even those more liberal spirits who neglect not many of the great duties of benevolence, yet hold the severer obligations of piety in no esteem, — I shall proceed, though, perhaps, with too little method, to remark on the notorious *effects* of the decay of this religious principle, as it corrupts our mode of education, infects domestic conduct, spreads the contagion downwards among servants and inferiors, and influences our general manners, habits, and conversation.

But what it is here proposed principally to insist on is, that this defect of religious principle is almost equally fatal, as to all the ends and purposes of genuine piety, whether it appear in the open contempt and defiance of all sacred institutions, or under the more decent veil of external observances, unsupported by such a conduct as is analogous to the Christian profession.

I shall proceed with a few remarks on a third class of fashionable characters, who profess to acknowledge Christianity as a perfect system of morals, while they deny its divine authority; and conclude with some slight animadversions on the opinion which these modish Christians maintain, that morality is the whole of religion.

It must be confessed, however, that manners and principles act reciprocally on each other, and are, by turns, cause and effect. For

instance; — the increased relaxation of morals produces the increased neglect of infusing religious principles in the education of youth: which effect becomes, in its turn, a cause; and in due time, when that cause comes to operate, helps on the decline of manners.

CHAP. I.

DECLINE OF CHRISTIANITY SHOWN, BY A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE RELIGION OF THE GREAT IN PRECEDING AGES.

If the general position of this little tract be allowed, namely, that religion is at present in no very flourishing state among those whose example, from the high ground on which they stand, guides and governs the rest of mankind, it will not be denied by those who are ever so superficially acquainted with the history of our country, that this has not always been the case, Those who make a fair comparison must allow that however the present age may be improved in other important and valuable advantages, yet that there is but little appearance remaining among the great and the powerful of that "righteousness which exalteth a nation:"—they must confess that there has been a *moral revolution* in the national manners and principles, very little analogous to that great *political* one which we hear so much and so justly extolled; that our public virtue bears little proportion to our public blessings; and that our religion has decreased in a pretty exact proportion to our having secured the means of enjoying it.

That the antipodes to wrong are hardly ever right, was very strikingly illustrated about the middle of the last century, when the fiery and indiscreet zeal of one party was made a pretext for the profligate impiety of the other; who, to the bad principle which dictated a depraved conduct, added the bad taste of being proud of it: — when even the least abandoned were absurdly apprehensive that an appearance of decency might subject them to the charge of fanaticism, a charge in which they took care to involve real piety as well as enthuthiastic pretence, till it became the general fashion to avoid no sin but hypocrisy, to dread no imputation but that of seriousness, and to be more afraid of the virtues which procure a good reputation than of every vice which ever earned a bad one. Party was no longer confined to political distinctions, but became a part of morals, and was carried into religion. The more profligate of the court party began to connect the idea of devotion with that of republicanism; and to prove their aversion to the one, thought they could never cast too much ridicule upon the other. The public taste became debauched; and to be licentious in principle, was thought by many to be the best way of making their court to the restored monarch, and of proving their abhorrence of the hypocritical side. And *Poems by a Person of Honour*, the phrase of the day to designate a fashionable author, were

often scandalous offences against modesty and virtue.

It was not till piety was thus unfortunately brought into disrepute, that persons of condition thought it made their sincerity, their abilities, or their good breeding, questionable, to appear openly on the side of religion. A strict attachment to piety did not antecedently subtract from a great reputation. Men were not thought the worse lawyers, generals, ministers, legislators, or historians, for believing, and even defending, the religion of their country. The gallant Sir Philip Sidney, the rash but heroic Essex, the politic and sagacious Burleigh, the all-accomplished Falkland *, not only publicly avowed their belief in Christianity, but even wrote some things of a religious nature. † These instances, and many others which might be adduced, are not, it will be allowed, selected from among contemplative recluses, grave divines, or authors by profession; but from the busy, the active, and the illustrious; from public characters, from men of strong passions, beset with great temptations; distinguished actors on the stage of life; and whose respective claims to the title of fine gentlemen, brave soldiers, or able statesmen, have never been called in question.

* Lord Falkland assisted the great Chillingworth in his incomparable work, *The Religion of a Protestant.*

† See that equally elegant and authentic work, *The Anecdotes of Royal and Noble Authors.*

What would the Hales, and the Clarendons, and the Somers's * have said, had they been told that the time was at no great distance when that sacred book, for which they thought it no derogation from their wisdom or their dignity to entertain the profoundest reverence; the book which they made the rule of their faith, the subject of their most serious study, and the foundation of their eternal hope; that this book would one day be of little more use to men in high public stations than to be the instrument of an oath; and that the sublimest institution of the Christian religion would soon be considered as little more than a necessary qualification for a place, or the legal preliminary to an office?

This, indeed, is the boasted period of free enquiry and liberty of thinking: but it is the peculiar character of the present age, that its mischiefs often assume the most alluring forms; and that the most alarming evils not only look so like goodness as to be often mistaken for it, but are sometimes mixed up with so much real good as often to disguise, though never to counteract, their malignity. Under the beautiful mask of an enlightened philosophy, all religious restraints are set at nought; and some of the deadliest wounds have been aimed at Christi-

* This consummate statesman was not only remarkable for a strict attendance on the public duties of religion, but for maintaining them with equal exactness in his family, at a period, too, when religion was most discountenanced.

anity, in works written in avowed vindication of the most amiable of all the Christian principles.* Even the prevalence of a liberal and warm philanthropy is secretly sapping the foundation of Christian morals, because many of its champions allow themselves to live in the open violation of the severer duties of justice and sobriety, while they are contending for the gentler ones of charity and beneficence.

The strong and generous bias in favour of universal toleration, noble as the principle itself is, has engendered a dangerous notion that all error is innocent. Whether it be owing to this, or to whatever other cause, it is certain that the discriminating features of the Christian religion are every day growing into less repute; and it is become the fashion, even among the better sort, to evade, to lower, or to generalise, its most distinguishing peculiarities.

There is so little of the Author of Christianity

* See particularly *Voltaire sur la Tolerance.* This is a common artifice of that insidious author. In this instance he has made use of the popularity he obtained in the fanatical tragedy at Thoulouse (the murder of Calas) to discredit, though in the most guarded manner, Christianity itself; degrading martyrdoms, denying the truth of the pagan persecutions, &c. &c. And by mixing some truths with many falsehoods, by assuming an amiable candour, and professing to serve the interests of goodness, he treacherously contrives to leave on the mind of the unguarded reader impressions the most unfavourable to Christianity.

left in his own religion, that an apprehensive believer is ready to explain, with the woman at the sepulchre, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." The locality of hell and the existence of an evil spirit are annihilated, or considered as abstract ideas. When they are alluded to, it is periphrastically; or they are rejected not on the ground of their being awful and terrible, but are set aside as topics too vulgar for the polished, too illiberal for the learned, and as savouring too much of credulity for the enlightened.

While we glory in having freed ourselves from the trammels of human authority, are we not turning our liberty into licentiousness, and wantonly struggling to throw off the *divine* authority too? Freedom of thought is the glory of the human mind, while it is confined within its just and sober limits; but though we may think ourselves accountable for *opinions* at no earthly tribunal, yet it should be remembered that thoughts as well as actions are amenable to the bar of God; and though we may rejoice that the tyranny of the spiritual Procrustes is so far annihilated, that we are in no danger of having our opinions lopped or lengthened till they are brought to fit the measure of human caprice, yet there is still a standard by which not only actions are weighed, but opinions are judged; and every sentiment which is clearly inconsistent with the revealed will of God is as

much throwing off *his* dominion as the breach of any of his moral precepts. This cuts up by the roots that popular and independent phrase, that "thoughts are free;" for in this view we are no more at liberty to indulge opinions in opposition to the express word of God than we are at liberty to infringe practically on his commandments.

There is, then, surely one test by which it is no mark of intolerance to try the principles of men, namely, the *Law and the Testimony*, and on applying to this touchstone, it is impossible not to lament, that, while a more generous spirit governs our judgment, a purer principle does not seem to regulate our lives. May it not be said, that, while we are justly commended for thinking charitably of the opinions of others, we seem, in return, as if we were desirous of furnishing them with an opportunity of exercising their candour by the laxity of principle in which we indulge ourselves? If the hearts of men were as firmly united to each other by the bond of charity as some pretend, they could not fail of being united to God also by one common principle of piety; and Christian piety furnishes the only certain source of all charitable judgment, as well as of all virtuous conduct.

Instead of abiding by the salutary precept of *judging no man*, it is become the fashion to exceed our commission, and to fancy every body to be in a safe state. "Judge not" is the precise

limit of our rule. There is no more encouragement to judge falsely on the side of worldly candour, than there is to judge harshly on the side of Christian charity. In forming our notions we have to choose between the Bible and the world, between the rule and the practice. Where these do not agree, it is left to the judgment of believers, at least, by which we are to decide. But we never act, in religious concerns, by the same rule of common sense and equitable judgment which governs us on other occasions. In weighing any commodity, its weight is determined by some generally allowed standard; and if the commodity be heavier or lighter than the standard weight, we add to or take from it: but we never break, or clip, or reduce the weight to suit the thing we are weighing; because the common consent of mankind has agreed that the one shall be considered as the standard to ascertain the value of the other. But, in weighing our principles by the standard of the Gospel, we do just the reverse. Instead of bringing our opinions and actions to the *balance of the sanctuary*, in order to determine and rectify their comparative deficiencies, we lower and reduce the standard of the Scripture-doctrines till we have accommodated them to our own purposes; so that, instead of trying others and ourselves by God's unerring rule, we try the truth of God's rule by its conformity or non-conformity to our own depraved notions and corrupt practices.

CHAP. II.

BENEVOLENCE ALLOWED TO BE THE REIGNING VIRTUE, BUT NOT *EXCLUSIVELY* THE VIRTUE OF THE PRESENT AGE. — BENEVOLENCE NOT THE WHOLE OF RELIGION, THOUGH ONE OF ITS MOST CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES. — WHETHER BENEVOLENCE PROCEEDS FROM A RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE WILL BE MORE INFALLIBLY KNOWN BY THE GENERAL DISPOSITION OF TIME, FORTUNE, AND THE COMMON HABITS OF LIFE, THAN FROM A FEW OCCASIONAL ACTS OF BOUNTY.

To all the remonstrance and invective of the preceding chapter, there will not fail to be opposed that which we hear every day so loudly insisted on, — the decided superiority of the present age in other and better respects. It will be said, that even those who neglect the outward forms of religion exhibit, however, the best proofs of the best principles; that the unparalleled instances of charity of which we are continual witnesses; that the many striking acts of public bounty, and the various new and noble improvements in this shining virtue, justly entitle the present age to be called, by way of eminence, *The Age of Benevolence.*

It is with the liveliest joy I acknowledge the

delightful truth. Liberality flows with a full tide through a thousand channels. There is scarcely a newspaper but records some meeting of men of fortune for the most salutary purposes. The noble and numberless structures for the relief of distress, which are the ornament and the glory of our metropolis, proclaim a species of munificence unknown to former ages. Subscriptions, not only to hospitals, but to various other valuable institutions, are obtained almost as soon as solicited. And who but must wish that these beautiful monuments of benevolence may become every day more numerous, and more extended!

Yet, with all these allowed and obvious excellences, it is not quite clear whether something too much has not been said of the liberality of the present age, in a comparative view with that of those ages which preceded it. A general alteration of habits and manners has at the same time multiplied public bounties and private distress; and it is scarcely a paradox to say, that there was probably less misery when there was less munificence.

If an increased benevolence now ranges through and relieves a wider compass of distress; yet still, if those examples of luxury and dissipation which promote that distress are still *more* increased, this makes the good done bear little proportion to the evil promoted. If the miseries removed by the growth of charity fall,

both in number and weight, far below those which are caused by the growth of vice and disorder; if we find that, though bounty is extended, yet those corruptions which make bounty so necessary are extended also, almost beyond calculation; if it appear that, though more objects are relieved by our money, yet incomparably more are debauched by our licentiousness — the balance, perhaps, will not turn out so decidedly in favour of the times as we are willing to imagine.

If, then, the most valuable species of charity is that which prevents distress by preventing or lessening vice, the greatest and most inevitable cause of want, — we ought not so highly to exalt the bounty of the great in the present day, in preference to that broad shade of protection, patronage, and maintenance which the wide-spread bounty of their forefathers stretched out over whole villages, I had almost said, whole provinces. When a few noblemen in a county, like their own stately oaks, (paternal oaks! which were not often set upon a card,) extended their sheltering branches to shield all the underwood of the forest; — when there existed a kind of passive charity, a negative sort of benevolence, which did good of itself; and without effort, exertion, or expense, produced the effect of all, and performed the best functions of bounty, though it did not aspire to the dignity of its name; — it was simply this: *great people staid*

at home; and the sober pomp and orderly magnificence of a noble family, residing at their own castle great part of the year, contributed in the most natural way to the maintenance of the poor; and in a good degree prevented that distress, which it must, however, thankfully be confessed it is the laudable object of modern bounty to relieve. A man of fortune might not then, it is true, so often *dine in public* for the benefit of the poor; but the poor were more regularly and comfortably fed with the abundant crumbs which then fell from the rich man's table. Whereas it cannot be denied that the prevailing mode of living has pared real hospitality to the very quick; and, though the remark may be thought ridiculous, it is a material disadvantage to the poor that the introduction of the modern artificial style of luxury has rendered the remains of the most costly table but of small value.

But even allowing the boasted superiority of modern benevolence, still it will not be inconsistent with the object of the present design, to enquire whether the diffusion of this branch of charity, though the most lovely offspring of religion, be yet any positive proof of the prevalence of religious principle? and whether it be not the fashion rather to consider benevolence as a substitute for Christianity than as an evidence of it?

It seems to be one of the reigning errors

among the better sort, to reduce all religion into benevolence, and all benevolence into almsgiving. The wide and comprehensive idea of Christian charity is compressed into the slender compass of a little pecuniary relief. This species of beneficence is indeed a bright gem among the ornaments of a Christian; but by no means furnishes all the jewels of his crown, which derives its lustre from the associated radiance of every Christian grace. Besides, the genuine virtues are all of the same family; and it is only by being seen in company with each other, and with Piety, their common parent, that they are certainly known to be legitimate.

But it is the property of the *Christian* virtues, that, like all other amiable members of the same family, while each is doing its own particular duty, it is contributing to the prosperity of the rest; and the larger the family the better they live together; as no one can advance itself without labouring for the advancement of the whole: thus, no man can be benevolent on Christian principles without self-denial; and so of the other virtues: each is connected with some other, and all with religion.

I already anticipate the obvious and hackneyed reply, that "whoever be the instrument, and whatever be the motive of bounty, still the poor are equally relieved, and therefore the end is the same;" and it must be confessed that those compassionate hearts, who cannot but be ear-

nestly anxious that the distressed should be relieved at any rate, should not too scrupulously enquire into any cause of which the effect is so beneficial. Nor indeed will candour scrutinize too curiously into the errors of any life of which benevolence will always be allowed to be the shining ornament, while it does not pretend to be the atoning virtue.

Let me not be misrepresented, as if I were seeking to detract from the value of this amiable feeling; we do not, surely, lower the practice, by seeking to ennoble the principle; the action will not be impaired by mending the motive; and no one will be likely to give the poor less because he seeks to please God more.

One cannot, then, help wishing that pecuniary bounty were not only not practised, but that it were not sometimes enjoined, too, as a redeeming virtue. In many conversations (I had almost said in many charity-sermons) it is insinuated as if a little alms-giving could pay off old scores contracted by favourite indulgences. This, though often done by well-meaning men to advance the interests of some present pious purpose, yet has the mischievous effect of those medicines which, while they may relieve a local complaint, are yet undermining the general habit.

That great numbers, who are not influenced by so high a principle as Christianity holds out, are yet truly compassionate, without hypocrisy and without ostentation, who can doubt? But

who that feels the beauty of benevolence can avoid being solicitous, not only that its offerings should comfort the receiver, but return in blessings to the bosom of the giver, by springing from such motives, and being accompanied by such a temper as shall redound to his eternal good! For that the benefit is the same to the object, whatever be the character of the benefactor, is but an uncomfortable view of things to a real Christian, whose compassion reaches to the souls of men. Such a one longs to see the charitable giver as happy as he is endeavouring to make the object of his bounty; but such a one knows that no happiness can be fully and finally enjoyed but on the solid basis of Christian piety.

For as religion is not, on the one hand, merely an opinion or a sentiment, so neither is it, on the other, merely an act or a performance; but it is a disposition, a habit, a temper: it is not a name, but a nature: it is a turning the whole mind to God: it is a concentration of all the powers and affections of the soul into one steady point, an uniform desire to please *Him.* This desire will naturally and necessarily manifest itself in our doing all the good we can to our fellow-creatures in every possible way; for it will be found that neither of the two parts into which practical religion is divided, can be performed with any degree of perfection but by those who unite both: it may be questioned

fice would enlarge his power, does not deserve the name of *benevolence.* And for such an unequivocal criterion of charity, to whom are we to look but to the conscientious Christian? No other spirit but that by which he is governed can subdue self-love; and where self-love is the predominant passion benevolence can have but a feeble or an accidental dominion.

Now if we look around, and remark the excesses of luxury, the costly diversions, and the intemperate dissipation in which numbers even of professing Christians indulge themselves, can any stretch of candour, can even that tender sentiment by which we are enjoined "to hope," and to "believe all things," enable us to hope and believe that such are actuated by a spirit of Christian benevolence, merely because we see them perform some casual acts of charity, which the spirit of the world can contrive to make extremely compatible with a voluptuous life; and the cost of which, after all, bears but little proportion to that of any one vice, or even any one vanity!

Men will not believe that there is hardly any one human good good quality which will know and keep its proper bounds, without the restraining influence of religious principle. There is, for instance, great danger lest a constant attention even to so right a practice as an invariable economy should incline the heart to the love of money. Nothing can effectually

counteract this natural propensity but the Christian habit of devoting those retrenched expenses to some good purpose; and then economy, instead of narrowing the heart, will enlarge it, by inducing a constant association of benevolence with frugality. An habitual attention to the wants of others is the only wholesome regulator of our own expenses; and carries with it a whole train of virtues, — disinterestedness, sobriety, self-denial, and temperance. And those who live in the custom of levying constant taxes on their own vanities for such purposes, serve the poor still less than they serve themselves. For if they are charitable upon true Christian principles, "they are laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come."

Thus when a vein of sound Christianity runs through the whole mass of a man's life, it gives a new value to all his actions, and a new character to all his views. It transmutes prudence and economy into Christian virtues; and every offering that is presented on the altar of charity becomes truly consecrated, when it is the gift of obedience, and the price of self-denial. Religion is that fire from heaven that can alone kindle the sacrifice, which, through the mediation and intercession of our great High Priest, "will go up for a memorial before God."

On the other hand, when any act of bounty is performed by way of composition with our Maker, either as a purchase or an expiation of

unhallowed indulgences; though, even in this case, God (who makes all the passions of men subservient to his good purposes) can make the gift equally beneficial to the receiver, yet it is surely not too severe to say, that to the giver such acts are an unfounded dependence, a deceitful refuge, a broken staff.

CHAP. III.

THE NEGLECT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, BOTH A CAUSE AND A CONSEQUENCE OF THE DECLINE OF CHRISTIANITY. — NO MORAL RESTRAINTS. — RELIGION ONLY INCIDENTALLY TAUGHT, NOT AS A PRINCIPLE OF ACTION. — A FEW OF THE MANY CAUSES WHICH DISPOSE THE YOUNG TO ENTERTAIN LOW OPINIONS OF RELIGION.

LET not the truly pious be offended, as if in the present chapter, which is intended to treat of the notorious neglect of Religious Education, I meant to insinuate that the principles and tempers of Christianity may be formed in the young mind, by the mere mechanical operation of early institution, without the co-operating aid of the Holy Spirit of God. To imply this would be indeed to betray a lamentable ignorance of human nature, of the disorder that sin has introduced, of the inefficacy of mere human means; and entirely to mistake the genius, and overlook the most obvious and important truths of our holy religion.

It must, however, be allowed, that the Supreme Being works chiefly by means; and though it be confessed that no defect of education, no corruption of manners can place any out of the reach of the Divine influences (for it is under

such circumstances, perhaps, that some of the most extraordinary instances of Divine grace have been manifested), yet it must be owned, that instructing children in principles of religion, and giving them early habits of temperance and piety, is the way in which we may most confidently expect the Divine blessing. And that it is a work highly pleasing to God, and which will be most assuredly accompanied by his gracious energy, we may judge from what he says of his faithful servant Abraham; "I know him that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord."

But religion is the only thing in which we seem to look for the end, without making use of the means; and yet it would not be more surprising if we were to expect that our children should become artists and scholars without being bred to arts and languages, than it is to look for a Christian world, without a Christian education.

The noblest objects can yield no delight, if there be not in the mind a disposition to relish them. There must be a congruity between the mind and the object, in order to produce any capacity of enjoyment. To the Mathematician, demonstration is pleasure; to the Philosopher, the study of nature; to the Voluptuary, the gratification of his appetite; to the Poet, the pleasures of the imagination. These

objects they each respectively pursue, as pleasures adapted to that part of their nature which they have been accustomed to indulge and cultivate.

Now as men will be apt to act consistently with their general views and habitual tendencies, would it not be absurd to expect that the philosopher should look for his sovereign good at a ball, or the sensualist in the pleasures of intellect or piety? None of these ends are answerable to the general views of the respective pursuer; they are not correspondent to his ideas; they are not commensurate to his aims. The sublimest pleasures can afford little gratification where a taste for them has not been previously formed. A clown, who should hear a scholar or an artist talk of the delights of a library, a picture-gallery, or a concert, could not guess at the nature of the pleasures they afford; nor would his being introduced to them give him much clearer ideas; because he would bring to them an eye blind to proportion, an understanding new to science, and an ear deaf to harmony.

Shall we expect, then, since men can only become scholars by diligent labour, that they shall become Christians by mere chance? Shall we be surprised if those do not fulfil the offices of religion, who are not trained to an acquaintance with them? And will it not be obvious that it must be some other thing besides the abstruse-

ness of creeds, which has tended to make Christianity unfashionable, and piety obsolete?

It probably will not be disputed, that in no age have the passions of our high-born youth been so early freed from all curb and restraint. In no age has the paternal authority been so contemptuously treated, or every species of subordination so disdainfully trampled upon. In no age have simple, and natural, and youthful pleasures so early lost their power over the mind; nor was ever one great secret of virtue and happiness, the secret of being *cheaply pleased*, so little understood.

A taste for costly, or artificial, or tumultuous pleasures cannot be gratified, even by their most sedulous pursuers, at every moment; and what wretched management is it in the economy of human happiness, so to contrive, as that the enjoyment shall be rare and difficult, and the intervals long and languid! Whereas real and unadulterated pleasures occur perpetually to him who cultivates a taste for truth and nature, and science and virtue. But these simple and tranquil enjoyments cannot but be insipid to him whose passions have been prematurely excited by agitating pleasures, or whose taste has been depraved by such as are debasing and frivolous; for it is of more consequence to virtue than some good people are willing to allow, to preserve the taste pure, and the judgment sound. A

vitiated intellect has no small connection with depraved morals.

Since amusements of some kind are necessary to all ages, — I speak now with an eye to mere human enjoyment, — why should it not be an object of early care, to keep a due proportion of them in reserve for those future seasons of life, in which they will be so much more needed? Why should there not, even for this purpose, be adopted a system of salutary restriction, to be used by parents toward their children, by instructors toward their pupils, and in the progress of life by each man toward himself? In a word, why should not the same reasons, which have induced us to tether inferior animals, suggest the expediency of, in some sort, tethering man also? Since nothing but experience seems to teach him, that if he be allowed to anticipate his future possessions, and trample all the flowery fields of real, as well as those of imaginary and artificial enjoyment, he not only endures present disgust, but defaces and destroys all the rich materials of his future happiness; and leaves himself, for the rest of his life, nothing but ravaged fields and barren stubble.

But the great and radical defect, and that which comes more immediately within the present design, seems to be, that in general the characteristical principles of Christianity are not early and strongly infused into the mind: that

religion, if taught at all, is rather taught incidentally, as a thing of subordinate value, than as the leading principle of human actions, the great animating spring of human conduct. Were the high influential principles of the Christian religion anxiously and early inculcated, we should find that those lapses from virtue, to which passion and temptation afterwards too frequently solicit, would be more easily recoverable.

For though the evil propensities of fallen nature, and the bewitching allurements of pleasure, will too often seduce even those of the best education into devious paths, yet we shall find that men will seldom be *incurably* wicked, unless that internal corruption of principle has taken place, which teaches them how to justify iniquity by argument, and to confirm evil conduct by the sanction of false reasoning; or where there is a total ignorance of the very nature and design of Christianity, which ignorance can only exist where early religious instruction has been entirely neglected.

The errors occasioned by the violence of passion may be reformed, but systematic wickedness will be only fortified by time; and no decrease of strength, no decay of appetite, can weaken the power of a pernicious principle. He who deliberately commits a bad action, puts himself, indeed, out of the path of safety; but he who adopts a false principle, not only throws

himself into the enemy's country, but burns the ships, breaks the bridge, cuts off every retreat by which he might hope one day to return into his own.

It is remarkable that in almost all the celebrated characters of whom we have an account in former periods of the English History, we find a serious attention to religion discovering itself at the close of life, however the preceding years might have been misemployed. We meet with striking examples of this kind amongst statesmen, amongst philosophers, amongst men of business, and even amongst men of pleasure. We have on record the dying sentiments of *Walsingham*, of *Smith*, of *Hatton*, the favourites of Queen Elizabeth. We see, in the following reign, *Raleigh* supporting himself by religion under the severity of his fate; *Bacon* seeking comfort in devotion amidst his disgraces; and *Wotton*, after having been ambassador to almost every court in Europe, taking refuge at last in a pious retirement at Eton college. But to enumerate instances would be endless, when, in fact, we scarcely discover a single instance to the contrary. In those times, it was considered as a matter even of common decency, that advanced age should possess, at least, the exterior of piety; and we have every reason to believe, that an irreligious old man would have been pointed at as a sort of monster.

But is this the case in our day? Do we now

commonly perceive in any rank that disposition to close life religiously, which at the period to which I have alluded was so general even in the fashionable world? I fear it is so far the reverse, that if Pope had been our contemporary, and were now composing his famous Ethical Poem, he could not hazard even that light remark,

> That beads and prayer-books are the toys of age,

without grossly violating probability.

But to what cause are we to ascribe that superannuated impiety, which seems to distinguish the present from the preceding generations? Is it not chiefly owing to the neglect of early religious instruction, which now for so many years has been gaining ground among us? In the last age even public schools were places, no less of Christian than of classical institution: and the omission of religious worship, whether public or private, was deemed, at least, as censurable a fault as the neglect of a lesson. Parents had not yet imbibed that maxim of modern refinement, that religious instruction ought to be deferred until the mind be capable of choosing for itself — that is, until it be so pre-occupied as to leave neither room nor relish for the articles of Christian faith, or the rules of Christian obedience. The advice of the wise king of Israel of "training up a child in the way he should go," had not then

become obsolete; and the truth of his assertion, in the remaining clause of the passage, was happily realised in the sincere, though perhaps late, return of many a wanderer.

Even in the very laws of our nature, there seems to be a gracious provision for promoting the final efficacy of early religious instruction. When the old man has no longer any relish left for his accustomed gratifications, in what way does he endeavour to fill up the void? Is it not by sending back his thoughts to his early years, and endeavouring to live over again in idea those scenes which, in this distant retrospect, appear far more delightful than he had found them to be at the actual period of enjoyment? Disgusted at every thing around him, and disappointed in those pursuits to which he had once looked forward with all the ardour of hope; but to which he now feels he has sacrificed in vain his quiet, and perhaps his integrity, he takes a pensive pleasure in reviewing the season when his mind was yet cheerful and innocent; and even the very cares and anxieties of that happy period, appear to him now, in a more captivating form than any pleasures he can yet hope to enjoy. What then is more natural, I had almost said more certain, than that if the principles of religion were inculcated, and the feelings of devotion excited in his mind in that most susceptible season of life, they should now revive as well as other contempo-

rary impressions, and present themselves in a point of view the more interesting, because, while all other instances of youthful occupation can be only *recollected*, these may be called up into fresh existence, and be enjoyed even more perfectly than before.

The defects of memory also, which old age induces, will, in this instance, assist rather than obstruct. It almost universally happens, that the more recent transactions are those soonest forgotten, while the events of youth and childhood are remembered with accuracy. If, therefore, pious principles have been implanted, they will, even by the course of nature, be recollected, while those things which most contributed to hinder their growth are swept from the memory. What a powerful encouragement, then, does this consideration afford! or rather what an indispensable obligation does it lay upon parents, to store the minds of their children with the seeds of piety! And, on the other hand, what unnatural barbarity is it, irretrievably to shut up this last refuge of the wretched, by a neglect of this duty; and to render it impossible for those who had "stood all the day idle," to be called, at least without a miracle, even at the eleventh hour!

No one surely will impute to bigotry or enthusiasm, the lamenting or even remonstrating against such desperate negligence; nor can it be deemed illiberal to enquire, whether even a still

greater evil does not exist? I mean, whether pernicious principles are not as strenuously inculcated as those of real virtue and happiness are discountenanced? Whether young men are not expressly taught to take custom and fashion as the ultimate and exclusive standard by which to try their principles and to weigh their actions? Whether some idol of false honour be not consecrated and set up for them to worship? Whether even among the better sort, reputation be not held out as a motive of sufficient energy to produce virtue, in a world where yet the greatest vices are every day practised openly, without at all obstructing the reception of those who practise them into the best company? Whether resentment be not ennobled; and pride, and many other passions, erected into honourable virtues — virtues not less repugnant to the genius and spirit of Christianity than obvious and gross vices? Will it be thought impertinent to enquire if the awful doctrines of a perpetually present Deity, and a future righteous judgment, are early impressed and lastingly engraven on the hearts and consciences of our high-born youth?

Perhaps, if there be any one particular in which we fall remarkably below the politer nations of antiquity, it is in that part of education which has a reference to purity of mind, and the discipline of the heart.

The great secret of religious education, which

seems banished from the present practice consists in training young men to an habitual interior restraint, an early government of the affections, and a course of self-control over those tyrannizing inclinations which have so natural a tendency to enslave the human heart. Without this habit of moral restraint, which is one of the fundamental laws of Christian virtue, though men may, from natural temper, often *do* good, yet it is impossible that they should ever *be* good. Without the vigorous exercise of this controlling principle, the best dispositions and the most amiable qualities will go but a little way towards establishing a virtuous character. For the best dispositions will be easily overcome by the concurrence of passion and temptation, in a heart where the passions have not been accustomed to this wholesome discipline: and the most amiable qualities will but more easily betray their possessor, unless the heart be fortified by repeated acts and long habits of resistance.

In this, as in various other instances, we may blush at the superiority of Pagan institution. Were the Roman youth taught to imagine themselves always in the awful presence of Cato, in order to habituate them betimes to suppress base sentiments, and to excite such as were generous and noble? And should not the Christian youth be continually reminded, that a greater than Cato is here? Should they not

be trained to the habit of acting under the constant impression, that *He* to whom they must one day be accountable for intentions, as well as words and actions, is witness to the one as well as the other? that he not only is "about their path," but "understands their very thoughts?"

Were the disciples of a pagan * leader taught that it was a motive sufficient to compel their obedience to any rule, whether they liked it or not, that it had the authority of their teacher's name? Were the bare words, *the master hath said it*, sufficient to settle all disputes, and to subdue all reluctance? And shall the scholars of a more divine teacher, who have a code of laws written by God himself, be contented with a lower rule, or abide by a meaner authority? And is any argument drawn from human considerations likely to operate more forcibly on a dependent being, than that simple but grand assertion, with which so many of the precepts of our religion are introduced — Because, THUS SAITH THE LORD?

It is doing but little, in the infusion of first principles, to obtain the bare assent of the understanding to the existence of one Supreme Power, unless the heart and affections go along with the conviction, by our conceiving of that power as intimately connected with ourselves. A feeling temper will be but little affected with the

* Pythagoras.

cold idea of a *geometrical* God, as the excellent Pascal expresses it, who merely adjusts all the parts of matter, and keeps the elements in order. Such a mind will be but little moved, unless he be taught to consider his Maker under the interesting and endearing representation which revealed religion gives of him. That "God is," will be to him rather an alarming than a consolatory idea; till he be persuaded of the subsequent proposition, that "he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Nay, if natural religion *does* even acknowledge one awful attribute, that "God is just," it will only increase the terror of a tender conscience, till it be learned from the fountain of truth, that he is "the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."

But if the great sanctions of our religion are not deeply engraven on the heart, where shall we look for any other adequate curb to the fiery spirit of youth? For let the elements be ever so kindly mixed in a human composition, let the natural temper be ever so amiable, still, whenever a man ceases to think himself an accountable being, what motive can he have for resisting a strong temptation to a present good, when he has no dread that he shall thereby forfeit a greater future good?

It may, perhaps, be objected, that this deep sense of religion would interfere with the general purpose of education, which is designed to

qualify men for the business of human life, and not to train up a race of monks and ascetics.

There is, however, so little real solidity in this specious objection, that I am firmly persuaded, that if religious principles were more deeply impressed on the heart, even the things of this world would be much better carried on. For where are we to look for all the qualities which constitute the man of business; for punctuality, diligence, and application, for such attention in doing every thing in its proper day (the great hinge on which business turns), as among men of principle? Economy of time, truth in observing his word, never daring to deceive or to disappoint — these form the very essence of an active and a useful character; and for these to whom shall we most naturally look? Who is so little likely to be "slothful in business" as he who is "fervent in spirit?" And will not he be most regular in dealing with men, who is most diligent in "serving the Lord?"

But, it may be said, allowing that religion does not necessarily spoil a man of *business*, yet it would effectually defeat those accomplishments, and counteract that fine breeding, which essentially constitute the *gentleman*.

This, again, is so far from being a natural consequence, that, supposing all the other real advantages of parts, education, and society, to be equally taken into the account, there is no doubt but that, in point of true politeness, a

real Christian would beat the world at its own weapons, the world itself being judge.

It must be confessed that, in the present corrupt state of things, there is scarcely any one contrivance for which we are more obliged to the inventions of mankind than for that of politeness, as there is perhaps no screen in the world which hides so many ugly sights; yet while we allow that there never was so admirable a substitute for real goodness as good-breeding, it is certain that the principles of Christianity put into action, would of themselves produce more genuine politeness than any maxims drawn from motives of human vanity or worldly convenience. If *love, peace, joy, long-suffering, gentleness, patience, goodness,* and *meekness,* may be thought instruments to produce sweetness of manners, these we are expressly told are "the fruits of the spirit." If mourning with the afflicted, rejoicing with the happy; if to "esteem others better than ourselves;" if "to take the lowest room;" if "not to seek our own;" if "not to behave ourselves unseemly;" if "not to speak great swelling words of vanity"—if these are amiable, engaging, and polite parts of behaviour, then would the documents of Saint Paul make as true a fine gentleman as the *Courtier of Castiglione,* or even the *Letters of Lord Chesterfield* himself; then would simulation, and dissimulation, and all the nice shades and delicate gradations of passive and active deceit be ren-

dered superfluous, and the affections of every heart be won by a shorter and a surer way than by the elegant obliquities of this late popular preceptor, whose mischiefs have outlived his reputation; and who, notwithstanding the present just declension of his fame, greatly helped, during its transient meridian, to relax the general nerve of virtue, and has left a taint upon the public morals, of which we are still sensible.

That self-abasement, then, which is inseparable from true Christianity, and the external signs of which good-breeding knows so well how to assume; and those charities which suggest invariable kindness to others, even in the smallest things, would, if left to their natural workings, produce that gentleness which it is one great object of a polite education to imitate. They would produce it, too, without effort and without exertion; for being inherent in the substance, it would naturally discover itself on the surface.

For however useful the institutions of polished society may be found, yet they can never alter the eternal difference between right and wrong, or convert appearances into realities; they cannot transform decency into virtue, nor make politeness pass for principle. And the advocates for fashionable breeding should be humbled to reflect, that every convention of artificial manners was adopted not to *cure*, but to *conceal*, deformity: that though the superficial civilities

of elegant life tend to make this corrupt world a more tolerable place than it would be without them, yet they never will be considered as a substitute for truth, nor a commutation for virtue, by HIM who is to pass the definitive sentence on the characters of men.

Among the many prejudices which the young and the gay entertain against religion, one is, that it is the declared enemy to wit and genius. But, says one of its wittiest champions *, "Piety enjoins no man to be dull:" and it will be found, on a fair enquiry, that though it cannot be denied that irreligion has had able men for its advocates, yet they have never been the *most* able. Nor can any learned profession, any department in letters or in science, produce a champion on the side of unbelief, but Christianity has a still greater name to oppose to it; *philosophers* themselves being judges.

He who studied the book of nature with a scrutiny which has scarcely been permitted to any other mortal eye, was deeply learned in the book of God†; and the ablest writer on the intellect of man has left one of the ablest treatises *on the Reasonableness of Christianity*. This essay of Mr. Locke on the *Human Understanding*, will stand up to latest ages, as a monument of wisdom; while Hume's posthumous work, *the Essay on Suicide*, which had excited such

* Dr. South. † Sir Isaac Newton.

large expectations, has been long since forgotten.*

The example of Pascal has proved that as much rhetoric, and logic too, may be shown in defending Revelation as in attacking it. His geometrical spirit was not likely to take up with any proofs but such as came as near to demonstration as the nature of the subject would admit. *Erasmus*, in his writings on the ignorance of the monks, and the Provincial Letters on

* The Essay on Suicide was published soon after Mr. Hume's death. It might mortify his liberal mind (if matter and motion were capable of consciousness) to learn, that this his dying legacy, the last concentrated effort of his genius and his principles, sent from the grave, as it were, by a man so justly renowned in other branches of literature, produced no sensation on the public mind. And that the precious information that every man had a right to be his own executioner was considered as a privilege so little desirable, that it probably had not the glory of converting one *cross road* into a cemetery. It is to the credit of this country that fewer copies of this work were sold than perhaps ever was the case with a writer of so much eminence. A more impotent act of wickedness has seldom been achieved, or one which has had the glory of making fewer persons wicked or miserable. That cold and cheerless oblivion which he held out as a refuge to beings who had solaced themselves with the soothing hope of immortality has, by a memorable retribution, overshadowed his last labour; the Essay on Suicide being already as much forgotten as he promised the best men that they themselves would be. And this favourite work became at once a prey to that forgetfulness to which he had consigned the whole human race.

the fallacies of the Jesuits, while they exhibit as entire a freedom from bigotry, exhibit also as much pointed wit, and as much sound reasoning, as can be found in the whole mass of modern philosophy.

But while the young adopt the opinion from one class of writers, that religious men are weak men, they acquire from another class a notion that they are ridiculous. And this opinion, by mixing itself with their common notions, and deriving itself from their very amusements, is the more mischievous, as it is imbibed without suspicion, and entertained without resistance.

One common medium through which they take this false view is, those favourite works of wit and humour, so captivating to youthful imaginations, where no small part of the author's success, perhaps, has been owing to his dexterously introducing a pious character with so many virtues, that it is impossible not to love him; yet tinctured with so many absurdities, that it is equally impossible not to laugh at him. The reader's memory will furnish him with too many instances of what is here meant. The slightest touches of a witty malice can make the best character ridiculous. It is effected by any little awkwardness, absence of mind, an obsolete phrase, a formal pronunciation, a peculiarity of gesture. Or if such a character be brought, by unsuspecting honesty and credulous goodness, into some foolish scrape, it will stamp on him

an impression of ridicule so indelible, that all his worth shall not be able to efface it: and the young, who do not always separate their ideas very carefully, shall ever after, by this early and false association, conceive of piety as having something essentially ridiculous in itself.

But one of the most infallible arts by which the inexperienced are engaged on the side of irreligion, is that popular air of candour, good-nature, and toleration which it so invariably puts on. While sincere piety is often accused of moroseness and severity, because it cannot hear the doctrines on which it founds its eternal hopes derided without emotion, indifference and unbelief purchase the praise of candour at an easy price; because they neither suffer grief nor express indignation at hearing the most awful truths ridiculed, or the most solemn obligations set at nought. They do not engage on equal terms. The infidel appears good-humoured from his very levity; but the Christian cannot jest on subjects which involve his everlasting salvation.

The scoffers whom young people hear talk, and the books they hear quoted, falsely charge their own injurious opinions on Christianity, and then unjustly accuse her of being the monster they have made. They dress her up with the sword of persecution in one hand, and the flames of intolerance in the other; and then ridicule the sober-minded for worshipping an

idol which their misrepresentation has rendered as malignant as Moloch. In the mean time, they affect to seize on benevolence with exclusive appropriation as their own cardinal virtue, and to accuse of a bigoted cruelty that narrow spirit which points out the perils of licentiousness, and the terrors of a future account. And yet this benevolence, with all its tender mercies, is not afraid nor ashamed to endeavour at snatching away from humble piety the comfort of a present hope, and the bright prospect of a felicity that shall have no end. It does not, however, seem a very probable means of increasing the stock of human happiness, to plunder mankind of that principle, by the destruction of which friendship is robbed of its bond, society of its security, patience of its motive, morality of its foundation, integrity of its reward, sorrow of its consolation, life of its balm, and death of its support.*

It will not, perhaps, be one of the meanest

* Young persons, too, are liable to be misled by that extreme disingenuousness of the new philosophers, when writing on every thing and person connected with revealed religion. These authors often quote satirical poets as grave historical authorities; for instance, because Juvenal has said that the Jews were so narrow-minded that they refused to show a spring of water or the right road to an enquiring traveller who was not of their religion, I make little doubt but many an ignorant freethinker has actually gone away with the belief, that such good-natured acts of information were actually forbidden by the law of Moses.

advantages of a better state that, as the will shall be reformed, so the judgment shall be rectified; that "evil shall no more be called good," nor the "churl liberal;" nor the plunderer of our best possession, our principles, *benevolent*. Then it will be evident that greater injury could not be done to truth, nor greater violence to language, than by attempting to wrest from Christianity that benevolence which is, in fact, her most appropriate and peculiar attribute. — "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." If benevolence be "good-will to men," it was that which angelic messengers were not thought too high to announce, nor a much higher being than angels too great to teach by his example, and to illustrate by his death. It was the criterion, the very watch-word, as it were, by which he intended his religion and his followers should be distinguished. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Besides, it is the very genius of Christianity to extirpate all selfishness; on whose vacated ground benevolence naturally and necessarily plants itself.

But not to run through all the particulars which obstruct the growth of piety in young persons, I shall only name one more. They hear much declamation from the fashionable reasoners against the contracted and selfish spirit

of Christianity — that it is of a sordid temper, works for pay, and looks for reward.

This jargon of French philosophy, which prates of pure disinterested goodness acting for its own sake, and equally despising punishment and disdaining recompense, indicates as little knowledge of human nature as of Christian revelation, when it addresses man as a being made up of pure intellect, without any mixture of passions, and who can be made happy without hope, and virtuous without fear. These philosophers affect to be more independent than Moses, more disinterested than Christ himself; for "Moses had respect to the recompense of reward;" and Christ "endured the cross and despised the shame, for the joy that was set before him."

A creature hurried away by the impulse of some impetuous inclination is not likely to be restrained, if he be restrained at all, by a cold reflection on the beauty of virtue. If the dread of offending God, and incurring his everlasting displeasure, cannot stop him, how shall a weaker motive do it? When we see that the powerful sanctions which religion holds out are too often an ineffectual curb; to think of attaining the same end by feebler means, is as if one should expect to make a watch go the better by breaking the main spring; nay, as absurd as if the philosopher who inculcates the doctrine should undertake, with one of his fingers, to lift an im-

mense weight which had resisted the powers of the crane and the lever.

On calm and temperate spirits, indeed, in the hour of retirement, in the repose of the passions, in the absence of temptation, virtue does seem to be her own adequate reward; and very lovely are the fruits she bears, in preserving health, credit, and fortune. But on how few will this principle act! and even on them how often will its operation be suspended! And though virtue, for her own sake, might have captivated a few hearts, which almost *seem* cast in a natural mould of goodness, yet no motive could, at all times, be so likely to restrain even these (especially under the pressure of temptation) as this simple assertion — *For all this, God will bring thee into judgment.*

It is the beauty of our religion, that it is not held out exclusively to a few select spirits: it is not an object of speculation, or an exercise of ingenuity, but a *rule of life* as well as a scheme of salvation. It is suited to every condition, capacity, and temper. It is the glory of the Christian religion to *be*, what it was the glory of every ancient philosophic system *not* to be, *the religion of the people;* and that which constitutes its characteristic value, is its suitableness to the genius, condition, and necessities of all mankind.

For with whatsoever obscurities it has pleased God to shadow some parts of his written word, yet he has graciously ordered, that whatever is

necessary should be perspicuous also: and though, as to his adorable essence, "clouds and darkness are round about him;" yet these are not the medium through which he has left us to discover our duty. In this, as in all other points, revealed religion has a decided superiority over all the ancient systems of philosophy, which were always in many respects impracticable and extravagant, because not framed from observations drawn from a perfect knowledge "of what was in man." Whereas the whole scheme of the Gospel is accommodated to real human nature; laying open its mortal disease, presenting its only remedy; exhibiting rules of conduct, often difficult indeed, but never impossible; and where the rule was so high that the practicability seemed desperate, holding out a living pattern, to elucidate the doctrine and to illustrate the precept; offering every where the clearest notions of what we have to hope, and what we have to fear; the strongest injunctions of what we are to believe, and the most explicit directions of what we are to do: with the most encouraging offers of Divine assistance for strengthening our faith and quickening our obedience.

In short, whoever examines the wants of his own heart, and the appropriate assistance which the Gospel furnishes, will find them to be two tallies which exactly correspond — an internal evidence, stronger perhaps than any, than all other evidences, of the truth of revelation.

This is the religion with which the ingenuous hearts of youth should be warmed, and by which their minds, while pliant, should be directed. This will afford a "lamp to their paths," stronger, steadier, brighter than the feeble and uncertain glimmer of a cold and comfortless philosophy.

CHAP. IV.

OTHER SYMPTOMS OF THE DECLINE OF CHRISTIANITY — NO FAMILY-RELIGION — CORRUPT OR NEGLIGENT EXAMPLE OF SUPERIORS — THE SELF-DENYING AND EVANGELICAL VIRTUES HELD IN CONTEMPT — NEGLECT OF ENCOURAGING AND PROMOTING RELIGION AMONG SERVANTS.

It was by no means the design of the present undertaking to make a general invective on the corrupt state of manners, or even to animadvert on the conduct of the higher ranks, but inasmuch as the corruption of that conduct, and the depravation of those manners, appear to be a natural consequence of the visible decline of religion; and as operating in its turn, as a cause, on the inferior orders of society.

Of the other obvious causes which contribute to this decline of morals, little will be said. Nor is the present a romantic attempt to restore the simplicity of primitive manners. This is too literally an age of gold, to expect that it should be so in the poetical and figurative sense. It would be unjust and absurd not to form our opinions and expectations from the present general state of society. And it would argue great ignorance of the corruption which com-

merce, and conquest, and riches, and arts necessarily introduce into a state, to look for the same sober-mindedness, simplicity, and purity among the *dregs of Romulus*, as the severe and simple manners of elder Rome presented.

But though it would be an attempt of desperate hardihood, to controvert that maxim of the witty bard, that

> To mend the world's a vast design;

a popular aphorism, by the way, which has done no little mischief, inasmuch as, under the mask of hopelessness, it suggests an indolent acquiescence; yet to make the best of the times in which we live; to fill up the measure of our own actual, particular, and individual duties; and to take care that the age shall not be the worse for our having been cast into it, seems to be the bare dictate of common probity, and not a romantic flight of impracticable perfection.

Is it then so very chimerical to imagine that the benevolent can be sober-minded? Is it romantic to desire that the good should be consistent? Is it absurd to fancy that what has once been practised should not now be impracticable?

It is impossible not to help regretting that it should be the general temper of many of the leading persons of that age which arrogates to itself the glorious character of the *age of benevolence*, to be kind, considerate, and compassionate,

every where rather than at home; that the rich and the fashionable should be zealous in promoting religious as well as charitable institutions abroad, and yet discourage every thing which looks like religion in their own families: that they should be at a considerable expense in instructing the poor at a distance, and yet discredit piety among their own servants — those more immediate objects of every man's attention, whom Providence has enabled to keep any; and for whose conduct he will be finally accountable, inasmuch as he may have helped to corrupt it.

Is there any degree of pecuniary bounty without doors which can counteract the mischief of a wrong example at home, or atone for that infectious laxity of principle which spreads corruption wherever its influence extends? Is not he the best benefactor to society who sets the best example, and who does not only the most good, but the least evil? Will not that man, however liberal, very imperfectly promote virtue in the world at large, who neglects to disseminate its principles within the immediate sphere of his own personal influence, by a correct conduct and a blameless behaviour? Can a generous but profligate person atone by his purse for the disorders of his life? Can he expect a blessing on his bounties, while he defeats their effect by a profane or even a careless conversation?

In moral as well as in political treatises, it is often asserted that it is a great evil to do no good:

but it has not been, perhaps, enough insisted on, that it is a great good to do no evil. This species of goodness is not ostentatious enough for popular declamation; and the value of this abstinence from vice is, perhaps, not well understood but by Christians, because it wants the ostensible brilliancy of actual performance.

But as the *principles* of Christianity are in no great repute, so their concomitant *qualities*, the evangelical virtues, are proportionably disesteemed. Let it, however, be remembered, that those secret habits of self-control, those interior and unobtrusive virtues, which excite no astonishment, kindle no emulation, and extort no praise, are at the same time the most difficult and the most sublime; and, if Christianity be true, will be the most graciously accepted by *Him* who witnesses the secret combat and the silent victory; while the splendid deeds which have the world for their witness, and immortal fame for their reward, shall perhaps cost him who achieved them less than it costs a conscientious Christian to subdue one irregular inclination; a conquest which the world will never know, and, if it did, would probably despise.

Though great actions performed on human motives are permitted by the supreme Disposer to be equally beneficial to society with such as are performed on purer principles, yet it is an affecting consideration, that, at the final adjustment of accounts, the politician who *raised*

a state, or the hero who *preserved* it, may miss of that favour of God which, if it was not his motive, will certainly not be his reward. And it is awful to reflect, as we visit the monuments justly raised by public gratitude, or the statues properly erected by well-earned admiration;—it is awful, I say, to reflect on what may now be the unalterable condition of the illustrious object of these deserved but unavailing honours; to reflect that he who has saved a state may have lost his own soul!

A Christian life seems to consist of two things, almost equally difficult, — the adoption of good habits, and the excision of such as are evil. No one sets out on a religious course with a stock of native innocence, or actual freedom from sin; for there is no such state in human life. The natural heart is not, as has been too often supposed, a blank paper, whereon the Divine Spirit has nothing to do but to stamp characters of goodness: no! many blots are to be erased, many defilements are to be cleansed, as well as fresh impressions to be made.

The vigilant Christian, therefore, who acts with an eye to the approbation of his Maker, rather than to that of mankind, to a future account, rather than to present glory, will find that, diligently to cultivate the "unweeded garden" of his own heart; to mend the soil; to clear the ground of its indigenous vices, by practising the painful business of extirpation, will be

that part of his duty which will cost him most labour, and bring him least credit; while the fair flower of one showy action, produced with little trouble, and of which the very pleasure is reward enough, shall gain him more praise than the eradication of the rankest weeds which overrun the natural heart.

But the Gospel judges not after the manner of men; for it never fails to make the abstinent virtues a previous step to the right performance of the operative ones; and the relinquishing what is wrong to be a necessary prelude to the performance of what is right. It makes "ceasing to do evil" the indispensable preliminary to "learning to do well." It continually suggests that something is to be laid aside, as well as to be practised. We must "hate vain thoughts," before we can "love God's law." We must lay aside "malice and hypocrisy," to *enable* us "to receive the engrafted word." — Having "a conscience void of offence;" "abstaining from fleshly lusts;" "bringing every thought into obedience;" — these are actions, or rather negations, which, though they never will obtain immortality from the chisel of the statuary, the declamation of the historian, or the panegyric of the poet, will, however, be "had in everlasting remembrance," when the works of the statuary, the historian, and the poet will be no more.

And, for our encouragement, it is observable, that a more difficult Christian virtue generally

involves an easier one. A habit of self-denial in permitted pleasures, easily induces a victory over such as are unlawful. And to sit loose to our own possessions necessarily includes an exemption from coveting the possessions of others; and so on of the rest.

Will it be difficult, then, to trace back to that want of early restraint noticed in the preceding chapter, that license of behaviour which, having been indulged in youth, afterwards reigns uncontrolled in families; and which having infected education in its first springs, taints all the streams of domestic virtue? And will it be thought strange that that same want of religious principle which corrupted our children should corrupt our servants?

We scarcely go into any company without hearing some invective against the increased profligacy of this order of men; and the remark is made with as great an air of astonishment as if the cause of the complaint were not as visible as the truth of it. It would be endless to point out instances in which the increased dissipation of their *betters* (as they are oddly called) has contributed to the growth of this evil. But it comes only within the immediate design of the present undertaking to insist on the single circumstance of the almost total extermination of religion in fashionable families, as a cause adequate of itself to any consequence which depraved morals can produce.

Is there not a degree of injustice in persons who express strong indignation at those crimes which crowd our prisons, and furnish our incessant executions, and who yet discourage not an internal principle of vice; since those crimes are nothing more than that principle put into action? And it is no less absurd than cruel, in such of the great as lead disorderly lives, to expect to prevent vice by the laws they make to restrain or punish it, while their own example is a perpetual source of temptation to commit it. If, by their own practice, they demonstrate that they think a vicious life is the only happy one, with what colour of justice can they inflict penalties on others, who, by acting on the same principle, expect the same indulgence?

And, indeed, it is somewhat unreasonable to expect very high degrees of virtue and probity from a class of people whose whole life, after they are admitted into dissipated families, is one continued counteraction of the principles in which they have probably been bred.

When a poor youth is transplanted from one of those excellent institutions which do honour to the present age, and give some hope of reforming the next, into the family of his noble benefactor in town, who has, perhaps, provided liberally for his instruction in the country; what must be his astonishment at finding the manner of life to which he is introduced diametrically opposite to that life to which he has been taught

that salvation is alone annexed? He has been taught that it was his bounden duty to be devoutly thankful for his own scanty meal, perhaps, of barley-bread, yet he sees his noble lord sit down every day

Not to a dinner but a hecatomb;

to a repast for which every element is plundered, and every climate impoverished; for which nature is ransacked, and art is exhausted; without even the formal ceremony of a slight acknowledgment. It will be lucky for the master, if his servant does not happen to know that even the pagans never sat down to a repast without making a libation to their deities; and that the Jews did not eat a little fruit, or drink a cup of water, without an expression of devout thankfulness.

Next to the law of God, he has been taught to reverence the law of the land, and to respect an act of parliament next to a text of Scripture; yet he sees his honourable protector, publicly in his own house, engaged in the evening in playing at a game expressly prohibited by the laws, and against which, perhaps, he himself had been assisting in the day to pass an act.

While the contempt of religion was confined to wits and philosophers, the effect was not so sensibly felt. But we cannot congratulate the ordinary race of mortals on their emancipation from old prejudices, or their indifference to

sacred usages; as it is not at all visible that the world is become happier in proportion as it is become more enlightened. We might rejoice more in the boasted diffusion of light and freedom, were it not apparent that bankruptcies are grown more frequent, robberies more common, divorces more numerous, and forgeries more extensive, — that more rich men die by their own hand, and more poor men by the hand of the executioner, — than when Christianity was practised by the vulgar, and countenanced, at least, by the great.

Is it not to be regretted, therefore, while the affluent are encouraging so many admirable schemes for promoting religion among the children of the poor, that they do not like to *perpetuate* the principle, by encouraging it in their own children and their servants also? Is it not pity, since these last are so moderately furnished with the good things of this life, to rob them of that bright reversion, the bare hope of which is a counterpoise to all the hardships they undergo here, — especially since by diminishing this future hope, we shall not be likely to add to their present usefulness?

Still allowing, what has been already granted, that absolute infidelity is not the reigning evil, and that servants will, perhaps, be more likely to see religion neglected than to hear it ridiculed, would it not be a meritorious kindness in families of a better stamp to furnish them with more

opportunities of learning and practising their duty? Is it not impolitic, indeed, as well as unkind, to refuse them any means of having impressed on their consciences the operative principles of Christianity? It is but little, barely not to *oppose* their going to church, not to *prevent* their doing their duty at home; their opportunities of doing both ought to be facilitated, by giving them, at certain seasons, as few employments as possible that may interfere with both. Even when religion is by pretty general consent banished from our families at home, that only furnishes a stronger reason why our families should not be banished from religion in the churches.

But if these opportunities are not made easy and convenient to them, their superiors have no right to expect from them a zeal so far transcending their own, as to induce them to surmount difficulties for the sake of duty. Religion is never once represented in Scripture as a light attainment; it is never once illustrated by an easy, a quiet, or an indolent allegory. On the contrary, it is exhibited under the active figure of a combat, a race; something expressive of exertion, activity, progress. And yet many are unjust enough to think that this warfare can be fought, though they themselves are perpetually weakening the vigour of the combatant; this race be run, though they are incessantly obstructing the progress of him who runs, by some

hard and interfering command. That our compassionate Judge, who "knoweth whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but dust," is particularly touched with the feeling of *their* infirmities, can never be doubted; but what portion of forgiveness he will extend to those who lay on their virtue hard burdens "too heavy for them to bear," who shall say?

To keep an immortal being in a state of spiritual darkness is a positive disobedience to *His* law, who, when he bestowed the Bible, no less than when he created the material world, said, *Let there be light.* It were well, both for the advantage of master and servant, that the latter should have the doctrines of the Gospel frequently impressed on his heart; that his conscience should be made familiar with a system which offers such clear and intelligible propositions of moral duty. The striking interrogation, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" will, perhaps, operate as forcibly on an uncultivated mind as the most eloquent essay to prove that man is not an accountable being. That once credited promise, that "they who have done well shall go into everlasting life," will be more grateful to the spirit of a plain man, than that more elegant and disinterested sentiment, that *virtue is its own reward.* That "he that walketh uprightly walketh surely" is not, on the whole, a dangerous or a misleading maxim. And "Well done, good and faithful

servant! I will make thee ruler over many things," though offensive to the liberal spirit of philosophic dignity, is a comfortable support to humble and suffering piety. That "we should do to others as we would they should do to us" is a portable measure of human duty, always at hand, as always referring to something within himself, not amiss for a poor man to carry constantly about with him, who has neither time nor learning to search for a better. It is an universal and compendious law; so universal, as to include the whole compass of social obligation; so compendious, as to be inclosed in so short and plain an aphorism, that the dullest mind cannot misapprehend, nor the weakest memory forget it. It is convenient for bringing out on all the ordinary occasions of life. We need not say "who shall go up to heaven and bring it unto us? — for this word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it." *

For it is a very valuable part of the Gospel of Christ, that though it is an entire and perfect system in its design; though it exhibits one great plan, from which complete trains of argument, and connected schemes of reasoning may be deduced; yet in compassion to the multitude, for whom this benevolent institution was in a good measure designed, and who could not have com-

* Deut. xxx. 12. and 14.

prehended a long chain of propositions, or have embraced remote deductions, the most important truths of doctrine, and the most essential documents of virtue, are detailed in single maxims, and comprised in short sentences; independent of themselves, yet making a necessary part of a consummate whole; from a few of which principles the whole train of human virtues has been deduced, and many a perfect body of ethics has been framed.

If it be thought wonderful, that from so few letters of the alphabet, so few figures of arithmetic, so few notes in music, such endless combinations should have been produced in their respective arts; how far more beautiful would it be to trace the whole circle of morals thus growing out of a few elementary principles of Gospel truth!

All Seneca's arguments against the fear of death never yet reconciled one reader to its approach, half so effectually as the humble believer is reconciled to it by that simple persuasion, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

While the modern philosopher is extending the boundaries of human knowledge, by undertaking to prove that matter is eternal, — or enlarging the stock of human happiness, by demonstrating the extinction of spirit, — it can do no harm to an unlettered man to believe, that "heaven and earth shall pass away, but God's word shall not pass away." While the former

is indulging the profitable enquiry why the Deity made the world so late, or why he made it at all, it will not hurt the latter to believe that "in the beginning God made the world," and that in the end "he shall judge it in righteousness."

While the liberal scholar is usefully studying the law of nature and of nations, let him rejoice that his more illiterate brother possesses the plain conviction that "love is the fulfilling of the law," — that "love worketh no ill to his neighbour." And let him be persuaded that he himself, though he know all Tully's Offices by heart, may not have acquired a more feeling and operative sentiment than is conveyed to the *common* Christian in the rule to "bear each other's burdens." While the wit is criticising the creed, he will be no loser by encouraging his dependents to keep the commandments; since a few such simple propositions as the above furnish a more practical and correct rule of life than can be gleaned from all the volumes of ancient philosophy, justly eminent as many of them are for wisdom and purity. For though they abound with passages of true sublimity, and sentiments of great moral beauty, yet the result is naturally defective, the conclusions necessarily contradictory. This was no fault of the author, but of the system. The vision was acute, but the light was dim. The sharpest sagacity could not distinguish spiritual objects, in the twilight of natural religion, with that accuracy with which they are

now discerned by every common Christian, in the diffusion of Gospel light.

And whether it be that what depraves the principle darkens the intellect also, certain it is that an uneducated serious Christian reads his Bible with a clearness of intelligence, with an intellectual comment, which no sceptic or mere worldling ever attains. The former has not prejudged the cause he is examining. He is not often led by his passions, still more rarely by his interest, to resist his convictions. While "the secret of the Lord is (obviously) with them that fear him," the mind of them who fear him *not* is generally prejudiced by a retaining fee from the world, from their passions or their pride, before they enter on the enquiry.

With what consistency can the covetous man embrace a religion which so pointedly forbids him to lay up "treasures upon earth?" How will the man of spirit, as the world is pleased to call the duellist, relish a religion which allows not "the sun to go down upon his wrath?" How can the ambitious struggle for "a kingdom which is not of this world," and embrace a faith which commands him to lay down his crown at the feet of another? How should the professed wit, or the mere philosopher, adopt a system which demands, in a lofty tone of derision, "Where is the scribe? Where is the wise? Where is the disputer of this world?" How will the self-satisfied Pharisee endure a religion

which, while it peremptorily demands from him every useful action, and every right exertion, will not permit him to rest his hope of salvation on their performance? He whose affections are voluntarily rivetted to the present world will not much delight in a scheme whose avowed principle is to set him above it. — The obvious consequence of these "hard sayings" is illustrated by daily instances. "Have any of the rulers believed on him?" is a question not confined to the first age of his appearance. Had the most enlightened philosophers of the most polished nations collected all the scattered wit and learning of the world into one point in order to invent a religion for the salvation of mankind, the doctrine of the cross is, perhaps, precisely the thing they would never have hit upon; precisely the thing which, being offered to them, they would reject. The intellectual pride of the philosopher relished it as little as the carnal pride of the Jew; for it flattered human wit no more than it gratified human grandeur. The pride of great acquirements, and of great wealth, equally obstructs the reception of Divine truth into the heart; and whether the natural man be called upon to part either from "great possessions," or "high imaginations," he equally goes away sorrowing.

CHAP. V.

THE NEGLIGENT CONDUCT OF CHRISTIANS NO REAL OBJECTION AGAINST CHRISTIANITY. — THE REASON WHY ITS EFFECTS ARE NOT MORE MANIFEST TO WORLDLY MEN IS, BECAUSE BELIEVERS DO NOT LEAD CHRISTIAN LIVES. — PROFESSORS DIFFER BUT LITTLE IN THEIR PRACTICE FROM UNBELIEVERS. — EVEN REAL CHRISTIANS ARE TOO DIFFIDENT AND TIMID, AND AFRAID OF ACTING UP TO THEIR PRINCIPLES. — THE ABSURDITY OF THE CHARGE COMMONLY BROUGHT AGAINST RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, THAT THEY ARE TOO STRICT.

It is an objection frequently brought against Christianity, that if it exhibited so perfect a scheme, if its influences were as strong, if its effects were as powerful as its friends pretend, it must have produced more visible consequences in the reformation of mankind. This is not the place fully to answer this objection, which (like all the other cavils against our religion) continues to be urged just as if it never *had* been answered.

That vice and immorality prevail in no small degree in countries professing Christianity, we need not go out of our own to be convinced. But that this is the case only because this benign

principle is not suffered to operate in its full power will be no less obvious to all who are sincere in their enquiries: for if we allow (and who that examines impartially can help allowing?) that it is the natural tendency of Christianity to make men better, then it must be the aversion from receiving it, and not the fault of the principle, which prevents them from becoming so.

Those who are acquainted with the effects which Christianity actually produced in the first ages of the church, when it *was* received in its genuine purity, and when it *did* operate without obstruction, from its professors at least, will want no other proof of its inherent power and efficacy. At that period, its most decided and industrious enemy, the Emperor Julian, could recommend the *manners* of the Galileans to the imitation of his pagan high priest; though he himself at the same time was doing every thing which the most inveterate malice, sharpened by the acutest wit, and backed by the most absolute power, could devise, to discredit their doctrines.

Nor would the efficacy of Christianity be less visible now in influencing the conduct of its professors, if its principles were heartily and sincerely received. They would, were they of the true genuine cast, operate on the conduct so effectually, that we should see morals and manners growing out of principles, as we see other consequences grow out of their proper and

natural causes. Let but this great spring have its unobstructed play, and there would be little occasion to declaim against this excess, or that enormity. If the same skill and care which are employed in curing symptoms were vigorously levelled at the internal principle of the disease, the moral health would feel the benefit. If that attention which is bestowed in lopping the redundant and unsightly branches were devoted to the cultivation of a sound and uncorrupt root, the effect of this labour would soon be discovered by the excellence of the fruits.

For though, even in the highest possible exertion of religious principle, and the most diligent practice of all its consequential train of virtues, man would still find evil propensities enough, in his fallen nature, to make it necessary that he should counteract them, by keeping alive his diligence after higher attainments, and to quicken his aspirations after a better state; yet the prevailing temper would be in general right; the will would be in a great measure rectified; and the heart, feeling and acknowledging its disease, would apply itself diligently to the only remedy. Thus though even the best men have infirmities enough to deplore, commit sins enough to keep them deeply humble, and feel more sensibly than others the imperfections of that vessel in which their heavenly treasure is hid, they however have the internal consolation of knowing that they shall have to do with a

merciful Father, who "despiseth not the sighing of the contrite heart, nor the desire of such as be sorrowful;" who has been witness to all their struggles against sin, and to whom they can appeal with Peter for the sincerity of their desires: — "Lord! Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee."

All the heavy charges which have been brought against religion have been taken from the abuses of it. In every other instance the injustice of this proceeding would be notorious: but there is a general want of candour in the judgment of men on this subject, which we do not find them exercise on other occasions; that of throwing the fault of the erring or ignorant professor on the profession itself.

It does not derogate from the honourable profession of arms, that there are cowards and braggarts in the army. If any man lose his estate by the chicanery of an attorney, or his health by the blunder of a physician, it is commonly said that the one was a disgrace to his business and the other was ignorant of it; but no one therefore concludes that law and physic are contemptible professions.

Christianity alone is obliged to bear all the obloquy incurred by the misconduct of its followers; to sustain all the reproach excited by ignorant, by fanatical, by superstitious, or hypocritical professors. But whoever accuses it of a tendency to produce the errors of these pro-

fessors must have picked up his opinion any where rather than in the New Testament; which book being the only authentic history of Christianity, is that which candour would naturally consult for information.

But as worldly and irreligious men do not draw their notions from that pure fountain, but from the polluted stream of human practice; as they form their judgment of Divine truth from the conduct of those who pretend to be enlightened by it; some charitable allowance *must* be made for the contempt which they entertain for Christianity, when they see what poor effects it produces in the lives of the generality of professing Christians. What do they observe there which can lead them to entertain very high ideas of the principles which give birth to such practices?

Do men of the world discover any marked, any decided difference between the conduct of nominal Christians and that of the rest of their neighbours, who pretend to no religion at all? Do they see, in the daily lives of such, any great abundance of those fruits by which they have heard believers are to be known? On the contrary, do they not discern in them the same anxious and unwearied pursuit after the things of earth as in those who do not profess to have any thought of heaven? Do not they see them labour as sedulously in the interests of a debasing and frivolous dissipation as those who do not pretend to have any nobler object in view?

Is there not the same eagerness to plunge into all sorts of follies themselves, and the same unrighteous speed in introducing their children to them, as if they had never entered into a solemn engagement to renounce them? Is there not the same self-indulgence, the same luxury, and the same passionate attachment to the things of this world in *them*, as is visible in those who do not look for another?

Do not thoughtless neglect, and habitual dissipation answer, as to society, all the ends of the most decided infidelity? Between the barely decent and the openly profane there is indeed this difference,—that the one, by making no profession, deceives neither the world nor his own heart; while the other, by intrenching himself in forms, fancies that he does something, and thanks God that "he is not like this publican." The one only shuts his eyes upon the danger which the other despises.

But these unfruitful professors would do well to recollect that, by a conduct so little worthy of their high calling, they not only violate the law to which they have vowed obedience, but occasion many to disbelieve or to despise it; that they are thus, in a great measure, accountable for the infidelity of others, and of course will have to answer for more than their own personal offences: for did they in any respect live up to the principles they profess; did they adorn the doctrines of Christianity by a life in any

degree consonant to their faith; did they exhibit any thing of the "beauty of holiness" in their daily conversation; they would then give such a demonstrative proof, not only of the sincerity of their own obedience but of the brightness of that Divine light by which they profess to walk, that the most determined unbeliever would at last begin to think there must be *something* in a religion of which the effects were so visible, and the fruits so amiable; and might in time be led to "glorify" not *them*, not the imperfect doers of these works, but "their Father which is in heaven." Whereas, as things are at present carried on, the obvious conclusion must be, either that Christians do not believe in the religion they profess, or that there is no truth in the religion itself.

For will he not naturally say, that if its influences were so predominant, its consequences must be more evident? that if the prize held out were really so bright, those who truly believed so would surely *do* something, and *sacrifice* something to obtain it?

This effect of the careless conduct of believers on the hearts of others will probably be a heavy aggravation of their own guilt at the final reckoning; — and there is no negligent Christian can guess where the infection of his example may stop; or how remotely it may be pleaded as a palliation of the sins of others, who either may think themselves safe while they are only doing what Christians allow themselves to do; or who

may adduce a Christian's habitual violation of the Divine law as a presumptive evidence that there is no truth in Christianity.

This swells the amount of the actual mischief beyond calculation; and there is something terrible in the idea of this sort of indefinite evil, that the careless Christian can never know the extent of the contagion he spreads, nor the multiplied infection which *they* may communicate in *their* turn, whom *his* disorders first corrupted.

And there is this farther aggravation of his offence, that he will not only be answerable for all the positive evil of which his example is the cause; but for the omission of all the probable good which might have been called forth in others, had *his* actions been consistent with his profession. What a strong, what an almost irresistible, conviction would it carry to the hearts of unbelievers, if they beheld that characteristic difference in the manners of Christians which their profession gives one a right to expect; if they saw that disinterestedness, that humility, sober-mindedness, temperance, simplicity, and sincerity, which are the unavoidable fruits of a genuine faith? and which the Bible has taught them to expect in every Christian.

But, while a man talks like a saint, and yet lives like a sinner; while he professes to believe like an apostle, and yet leads the life of a sensualist; talks of an ardent faith, and yet ex-

hibits a cold and low practice; boasts himself the disciple of a meek Master, and yet is as much a slave to his passions as they who acknowledge no such authority; while he appears the proud professor of an humble religion, or the intemperate champion of a self-denying one; —such a man brings Christianity into disrepute, confirms those in error who might have been awakened to conviction, strengthens doubt into disbelief, and hardens indifference into contempt.

Even among those of a better cast and a purer principle, the excessive restraints of timidity, caution, and that "fear of man, which bringeth a snare," confine and almost stifle the generous spirit of an ardent exertion in the cause of religion. Christianity may pathetically expostulate, that it is not always "an open enemy which dishonours her," but her "familiar friend." And "What dost thou more than others?" is a question which even the good and worthy should often ask themselves, in order to quicken their zeal; to prevent the total stagnation of unexerted principles on the one hand, or the danger on the other of their being driven down the gulf of ruin by the unresisted and confluent tides of temptation, fashion, and example.

In a very strict and mortified age, of which a scrupulous severity was the predominant character, precautions against an excessive zeal

might, and doubtless would, be a wholesome and prudent measure. But in these times of relaxed principle and frigid indifference, to see people so vigilantly on their guard against the imaginary mischiefs of enthusiasm, while they run headlong into the real opposite perils of a destructive licentiousness, reminds us of the one-eyed animal in the fable; who, living on the banks of the ocean, never fancied he could be destroyed any way but by drowning, but, while he kept that one eye constantly fixed on the sea, on which side he concluded all the peril lay, he was devoured by an enemy on the dry land, from which quarter he never suspected any danger.

Are not the mischiefs of an enthusiastic piety insisted on with as much earnestness as if an extravagant devotion were the prevailing propensity? Is not the necessity of moderation as vehemently urged as if an intemperate zeal were the epidemic distemper of the great world? as if all our apparent danger and natural bias lay on the side of a too rigid austerity, which required the discreet and constant counteraction of an opposite principle? Would not a stranger be almost tempted to imagine, from the frequent invectives against extreme strictness, that abstraction from the world, and a monastic rage for retreat, were the ruling temper? that we were in some danger of seeing our places of diversion abandoned, and the enthusiastic scenes of the *Holy Fathers of the Desert* acted over

again by the frantic and uncontrollable devotion of our young persons of fashion?

It is not to be denied, that enthusiasm is an evil to which the more religious of the lower class are peculiarly exposed; and this from a variety of causes, upon which this is not the place to enlarge. But who will be hardy enough to assert that the class we are now addressing commonly fall into the same error. In order to establish or to overthrow this assertion, let each fashionable reader confess whether, within the sphere of his own observation, the fact be realised. Let each bring this vague charge specifically home to his own acquaintance. Let him honestly declare what proportion of noble enthusiasts, what number of honourable fanatics his own personal knowledge of the great world supplies. Let him compare the list of his enthusiastic with that of his luxurious friends, of his fanatical with his irreligious acquaintance, of "the righteous over much" with such as "care for none of these things;" of the strict and precise with that of the loose and irregular; of those who beggar themselves by their pious alms with those who injure their fortune by extravagance; of those who "are lovers of God" with those who are lovers of pleasure. Let him declare whether he sees more of his associates swallowed up in gloomy meditation or immersed in sensuality; whether more are the slaves of superstitious observances or of ambition. — Surely those

who address the rich and great in the way of exhortation and reproof would do particularly well to define exactly what is indeed the prevailing character; lest, for want of such discrimination, they should heighten the disease they might wish to cure, and increase the bias they would desire to counteract, by addressing to the voluptuary cautions which belong to the hermit, and thus aggravate his already inflamed appetites by invectives against an evil of which he is in little danger.

If, however, superstition, where it really does exist, injures religion, and we grant that it greatly injures it, yet we insist that scepticism injures it no less; for to deride or to omit any of the component parts of Christian faith is surely not a less fatal evil than making uncommanded additions to it.

It is seriously to be regretted in an age like the present, remarkable for indifference in religion and levity in manners, and which stands so much in need of lively patterns of firm and resolute piety, that many who really are Christians on the soberest conviction should not appear more openly and decidedly on the side they have espoused; that they assimilate so very much with the manners of those about them (which manners they yet scruple not to disapprove); and, instead of an avowed but prudent steadfastness, which might draw over the others, appear evidently fearful of being thought precise and

over scrupulous; and actually seem to disavow their right principles, by concessions and accommodations not strictly consistent with them. They often seem cautiously afraid of *doing too much*, and *going too far*; and the dangerous plea, the necessity of *living like other people*, of *being like the rest of the world*, and the propriety of *not being particular*, is brought as a reasonable apology for a too yielding and indiscriminate conformity.

But, at a time when almost all are sinking into the prevailing corruption, how beautiful a rare, a single integrity is, let the instances of Lot and Noah declare. And to those with whom a poem is a higher authority than the Bible, let me recommend the most animated picture of a righteous singularity that ever was delineated, in

> —— The Seraph Abdiel, faithful found
> Among the faithless, faithful only he
> Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
> Unshaken, unseduc'd, unterrify'd,
> His loyalty he kept, his love and zeal:
> Nor NUMBERS, nor EXAMPLES with him wrought
> To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
> Though SINGLE. PAR. LOST, B. iv.

Few, indeed, of the more orderly and decent have any objection to that degree of religion which is compatible with their general acceptance with others, or the full enjoyment of their own pleasures. For a formal and ceremonious

exercise of the outward duties of Christianity may not only be kept up without exciting censure, but will even procure a certain respect and confidence; and is not quite irreconcilable with a voluptuous and dissipated life. So far many go; and so far as "godliness is profitable to the life that *is*," it passes without reproach.

But as soon as men begin to consider religious exercises not as a decency but a duty; not as a commutation for a self-denying life but as a mean to promote a holy temper and a virtuous conduct; as soon as they feel disposed to carry the effect of their devotion into their daily life; as soon as their principles discover themselves, by leading them to withdraw from those scenes, and abstain from those actions in which the gay place their supreme happiness; as soon as something is to be *done*, and something is to be *parted with*,—then the world begins to take offence, and to stigmatise the activity of that piety which had been commended as long as it remained inoperative, and had only evaporated in words.

When religion, like the vital principle, takes its seat in the heart, and sends out supplies of life and heat to every part; diffuses motion, soul, and vigour, through the whole circulation, and informs and animates the entire man; when it operates on the practice, influences the conversation, breaks out into a lively zeal for the honour of God, and the best interests of mankind, especially in a man of talents, — then the

sincerity of heart or the sanity of mind of that person will become questionable; and it must be owing to a very fortunate combination of circumstances indeed, if he can at once preserve the character of parts and piety, and retain the reputation of a man of sense after he has acquired that of a Christian.

It is surely a folly to talk of being too holy, too strict, or too good. Where there really happens to appear some foundation for the charge of enthusiasm (as there are indeed sometimes in good people eccentricities which justify the censure), we may depend upon it, that it proceeds from some defect in the judgment, and not from any excess in the piety; for in goodness there is no excess: and it is as preposterous to say that any one is too good, or too pious, as that he is too wise, too strong, or too healthy; since the highest point in all these is only the perfection of that quality which we admired in a lower degree. There may be an *imprudent* but there cannot be a *superabundant* goodness. An ardent imagination may mislead a rightly-turned heart; and a weak intellect may incline the best intentioned to ascribe too much value to things of comparatively small importance. Such a one not having discernment enough to perceive where the force and stress of duty lie, may inadvertently discredit religion by a too scrupulous exactness in points of small intrinsic value. And even well-meaning men as well as hypocrites

may think they have done a meritorious service when their "mint" and "anise" are rigorously tithed.

But in observing the "weightier matters of the law," in the practice of universal holiness, in the love of God, there can be no possibility of exceeding, while there is no limitation in the command. We are in no danger of loving our neighbour *better* than ourselves; and let us remember that we do not go beyond, but fall short, of our duty, while we love him *less*. If we were commanded to love God with *some* of our heart, with *part* of our soul, and a *portion* of our strength, there would then be some colour for those perpetual cavils about the *proportion* of love and the *degree* of obedience which are due to him. But as the command is so definite, so absolute, so comprehensive, so entire, nothing can be more absurd than that unmeaning but not unfrequent charge, brought against religious persons, that *they are too strict*. It is in effect saying, that they love God too much, and serve him too well.

The foundation of this silly censure is commonly laid in the first principles of education, where an early separation is systematically made between duty and pleasure. One of the first baits held out for the encouragement of children is, that when they have done their *duty*, they will be entitled to some *pleasure*; thus forcibly disjoining what should be considered as inse-

parable. And there is not a more common justification of that idle and dissipated manner in which the second half of the Sunday is commonly spent, even by those who make a conscience of spending the former part properly, than that, "now they have done their duty, they may take their pleasure."

But while Christian observances are considered as tasks, which are to be got over to entitle us to something more pleasant; as a burden which we must endure in order to propitiate an inexorable Judge, who makes a hard bargain with his creatures, and allows them just so much amusement in pay for so much drudgery,—we must not wonder that such low views are entertained of Christianity, and that a religious life is reprobated as strict and rigid.

But to him who acts from the nobler motive of love, and the animating power of the Christian hope, the exercise is the reward, the permission is the privilege, the work is the wages. *He* does not carve out some miserable pleasure, and stipulate for some meagre diversion, to pay himself for the hard performance of his duty, who in that very performance experiences the highest pleasure; and feels the truest gratification of which his nature is capable, in devoting the noblest part of that nature to *His* service to whom he owes all, because from Him he has received all.

This reprobated strictness, therefore, so far

from being the source of discomfort and misery, as is pretended, is in reality the true cause of actual enjoyment, by laying the axe to the root of all those turbulent and uneasy passions, the unreserved and yet imperfect gratification of which does so much more tend to disturb our happiness, than that self-government which Christianity enjoins.

But all precepts seem rigorous, all observances are really hard, where there is not an entire conviction of God's right to our obedience, and an internal principle of faith and love to Christ to make that obedience pleasant. A religious life is indeed a hard bondage to one immersed in the practices of the world, and under the dominion of its appetites and passions. To a real Christian, it is "perfect freedom." He does not now abstain from such and such things, merely because they are forbidden, as he did in the first stages of his progress, but because his soul has no longer any pleasure in them. And it would be the severest of all punishments to oblige him to return to those practices, from which he once abstained with difficulty, and through the less noble principle of fear.

There is not, therefore, perhaps, a greater mistake than that common notion entertained by the more orderly part of the fashionable world, that a little religion will make people happy, but that a high degree of it is incompatible with all enjoyment. For surely *that* religion can add little

to a man's happiness which restrains him from the commission of a wrong action, but which does not pretend to extinguish the bad principle from which the act proceeded. A religion which ties the hands, without changing the heart; which, like the hell of Tantalus, subdues not the desire, yet forbids the gratification, is indeed an uncomfortable religion; and such a religion, though it may gain a man something on the side of reputation, will give him but little inward comfort. For what true peace can that heart enjoy which is left a prey to that temper which produced the evil, even though terror or shame may have prevented the outward act.

That people devoted to the pursuits of a dissipated life should conceive of religion as a difficult and even unattainable state, it is easy to believe. But that they should conceive of it as an unhappy state, is the consummation of their error and their ignorance: for that a *rational* being should have his understanding enlightened; that an *immortal* being should have his views extended and enlarged; that a *helpless* being should have a consciousness of assistance, a *sinful* being the prospect of pardon, or a *fallen* one the assurance of restoration, does not seem a probable ground of unhappiness: and on any other subject but religion such reasoning not only would not be admissible but would be accounted the wildest absurdity.

CHAP. VI.

A STRANGER, FROM OBSERVING THE FASHIONABLE MODE OF LIFE, WOULD NOT TAKE THIS TO BE A CHRISTIAN COUNTRY. — LIVES OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS EXAMINED, BY A COMPARISON WITH THE GOSPEL. — CHRISTIANITY NOT MADE THE RULE OF LIFE, EVEN BY THOSE WHO PROFESS TO RECEIVE IT AS AN OBJECT OF FAITH. — TEMPORISING WRITERS CONTRIBUTE TO LOWER THE CREDIT OF CHRISTIANITY. — LOOSE HARANGUES ON MORALS NOT CALCULATED TO REFORM THE HEART.

THE Christian religion is not intended, as some of its fashionable professors seem to fancy, to operate as a charm, a talisman, or incantation, and to produce its effect by our pronouncing certain mystical words, attending at certain consecrated places, and performing certain hallowed ceremonies; but it is an active, vital, influential principle, operating on the heart, restraining the desires, affecting the general conduct, and as much regulating our commerce with the world, our business, pleasures, and enjoyments, our conversations, designs, and actions, as our behaviour in public worship, or even in private devotion.

That the effects of such a principle are strik-

ingly visible in the lives and manners of the generality of those who give the law to fashion will not, perhaps, be insisted on; and, indeed, the whole present system of fashionable life is utterly destructive of seriousness. To instance only in the growing habit of frequenting great assemblies, which is generally thought insignificant, and is in effect so vapid, that one almost wonders how it can be dangerous. It would excite laughter, because we are so broken into the habit, were I to insist on the immorality of passing one's whole life in a crowd. But those promiscuous myriads which compose the society, falsely so called, of the gay world; who are brought together without esteem, remain without pleasure, and part without regret; who live in a round of diversions, the possession of which is so joyless, though the absence is so insupportable; — all these, by the mere force of incessant and indiscriminate association, weaken, and in time wear out, the best feelings and affections of the human heart. And the mere spirit of dissipation, thus contracted from invariable habit, even detached from all its concommitant evils, is in itself as hostile to a religious spirit as more positive and actual offences. Far be it from me to say that it is as criminal; I only insist that it is as opposite to that heavenly-mindedness which is the essence of the Christian temper.

Let us suppose an ignorant and unprejudiced

spectator, who should have been taught the theory of all the religions on the globe, brought hither from the other hemisphere. Set him down in the politest part of our metropolis, and let him determine, if he can, except from what he shall see interwoven in the texture of our laws, and kept up in the service of our churches, to what particular religion we belong. Let him not mix entirely with the most flagitious, but only with the most fashionable; at least, let him keep what they themselves call *the best company*. Let him scrutinise into the manners, customs, conversations, habits, and diversions, most in vogue, and then infer, from all he has seen and heard, what is the established religion of the land.

That it could not be the Jewish he would soon discover; for of rites, ceremonies, and external observances, he would trace but slender remains. He would be equally convinced that it could not be the religion of Old Greece and Rome; for that enjoined reverence to the gods, and inculcated obedience to the laws. His most probable conclusion would be in favour of the Mahometan faith, did not the excessive indulgence of some of the most distinguished, in an article of intemperance prohibited even by the sensual prophet of Arabia, defeat that conjecture.

How would the petrified enquirer be astonished, if he were told that all these gay,

thoughtless, luxurious, dissipated persons, professed a religion, meek, spiritual, self-denying; of which humility, poverty of spirit, a renewed mind, and nonconformity to the world, were the specific distinctions!

When he saw the sons of men of fortune, scarcely old enough to be sent to school, admitted to be spectators of the turbulent and unnatural diversions of racing and gaming, and the almost infant-daughters, even of wise and virtuous mothers (an innovation which Fashion herself forbade till now), carried with most unthrifty anticipation to the frequent and late protracted ball, — would he believe that we were of a religion which has required from these very parents a solemn vow that these children should be bred up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" That they should constantly "believe God's holy word, and keep his commandments?"

When he observed the turmoils of ambition, the competitions of vanity, the ardent thirst for the possession of wealth, and the wild misapplication of it when possessed,—how could he persuade himself that all these anxious pursuers of present enjoyment were the disciples of a Master who exhibited and compressed the very character and essence of his religion, as it were in a motto — "MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD?"

When he beheld those nocturnal clubs, so

subversive of private virtue and domestic happiness, would he conceive that we were of a religion which in express terms "exhorts young men to be sober-minded?"

When he saw those magnificent and brightly illuminated structures which decorate and disgrace the very precincts of the royal residence (so free itself from all these pollutions); when he beheld the nightly offerings made to the demon of play, on whose cruel altar the fortune and happiness of wives and children are offered up without remorse; would he not conclude that we were of some of those barbarous religions which enjoin unnatural sacrifices, and whose horrid deities are appeased with nothing less than human victims?

Now ought we not to pardon our imaginary spectator, if he should not at once conclude that all the various descriptions of persons above noticed professed the Christian religion; supposing him to have no other way of determining but by that most natural one, the conformity of their manners to that rule by which he had undertaken to judge them? We, indeed, ourselves must judge with a certain latitude, and candidly take the present state of society into the account; which, in some few instances perhaps, must be allowed to dispense with that literal strictness which more peculiarly belonged to the first ages of the Gospel.

But as this is really a Christian country, pro-

fessing to enjoy the purest faith in the purest form, it cannot be unreasonable to go a little further, and enquire whether Christianity, however firmly established, and generally professed in it, is really practised by that order of fashionable persons, who, while they are absorbed in the delights of the world, and their whole souls devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, yet still arrogate to themselves the honourable name of Christians, and occasionally testify their claim to this high character, by a general profession of their belief in, and a decent occasional compliance with, the forms of religion, and the ordinances of our church?

This enquiry must be made, not by a comparison with the state of Christianity in other countries; (a mode always fallacious, whether adopted by nations or individuals, is that of comparing themselves with those who are still worse;) nor must it be made from any notions drawn from custom, decency, or any other human standard; but from a Scripture view of what real religion is; — from any one of those striking and comprehensive representations of it, which may be found condensed in so many single passages of the sacred writings.

Whoever, then, looks into the Book of God, and observes its prevailing spirit, and then looks into that part of the world under consideration, will not surely be thought very censorious, if he pronounce that the conformity between them

does not seem to be *very* striking; and that the manners of the one do not very evidently appear to be dictated by the spirit of the other. Will he discover that the Christian religion is so much as pretended to be made the *rule of life* even by that decent order who profess not to have discarded it as an object of faith? Do even the more regular, who neglect not public observances, consider Christianity as *the measure, and God as the end of their actions?* Do even what the world calls religious persons employ their time, their abilities, and their fortune, as talents for which they, however, confess they believe themselves accountable; or do they in any respect live, I will not say up to their profession, (for what human being does so?) but in any consistency with it, or even with an eye to its predominant tendencies? Do persons in general of this description seem to consider the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel as any thing more than a form of words, necessary indeed to be repeated, and proper to be believed? But do they consider them as indispensably necessary to be adopted into a governing principle of action?

Is it acting a consistent part to declare in the solemn assemblies that they are "miserable offenders," and that "there is no health in them," and yet never in their daily lives to discover any symptom of that humility and self-abasement, which should naturally be implied in such a declaration?

Is it reasonable or compatible, I will not say with piety, but with good sense, earnestly to lament having "followed the devices and desires of their own hearts," and then deliberately to plunge into such a torrent of dissipation as clearly indicates that they do not struggle to oppose *one* of these devices, to resist *one* of these desires? I dare not say this is hypocrisy, I do not believe it is, but surely it is inconsistency.

"Be ye not conformed to this world," is a leading principle in the book they acknowledge as their guide. But after unresistingly assenting to this as a doctrinal truth, at church,—how absurd would they think any one who should expect them to adopt it into their practice at home! Perhaps the whole law of God does not exhibit a single precept more expressly, more steadily, and more uniformly rejected by the class in question. If it mean any thing, it can hardly be consistent with that mode of life emphatically distinguished by the appellation of *fashionable.*

Now, would it be much more absurd (for any other reason but because it is not the custom) if our legislators were to meet one day in every week, gravely to read over all the obsolete statutes and rescinded acts of parliament, than it is for the order of persons of the above description to assemble every Sunday, to profess their belief in and submission to a system of principles, which they do not so much as *intend* shall be binding on their practice?

But to continue our enquiry.—There is not a more common or more intelligible definition of human duty, than that of "Fear God, and keep his commandments." Now, as to the first of these inseparable precepts, can we, with the utmost stretch of charity, be very forward to conclude that God is really "very greatly feared," in secret, by those who give too manifest indications that they live "without him in the world?" And as to the latter precept, which naturally grows out of the other,—without noticing any of the flagrant breaches of the moral law, let us only confine ourselves to the allowed, general, and notorious violation of the third and fourth commandments, by the higher as well as by the lower orders; breaches so flagrant, that they force themselves on the observation of the most inattentive, too palpably to be either unnoticed or palliated.

Shall we have reason to change our opinion if we take that Divine representation of the sum and substance of religion, and apply it as a touchstone in the present trial,—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart, and with *all* thy mind, and with *all* thy soul, and with *all* thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself?" Now, judging by inference, do we see many public proofs of that heavenly-mindedness which would be the inevitable effect of such a fervent and animated dedication of all the powers, faculties, and affections of the soul to

him who gave it? And, as to the great rule of social duty expressed in the second clause, do we observe as much of that considerate kindness, that pure disinterestedness, that conscientious attention to the comfort of others, especially of dependents and inferiors, as might be expected from those who enjoy the privilege of so unerring a standard of conduct? a standard which, if impartially consulted, must make our kindness to others bear an exact proportion to our self-love: a rule in which Christian principle, operating on human sensibility, could not fail to decide aright in every supposable case. For no man can doubt how he ought to act towards another, while the inward corresponding suggestions of conscience and feeling concur in letting him know how he would wish, in a change of circumstances, that others should act towards him.

Or suppose we take a more detailed survey, by a third rule, which indeed is not so much the principle as the effect of piety,—"True religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself *unspotted from the world.*" Now, if Christianity insists that obedience to the latter injunction be the true evidence of the sincerity of those who fulfil the former, is the beneficence of the fashionable world *very* strikingly illustrated by this spotless purity, this exemption from the pollutions of the

world, which is here declared to be its invariable concomitant?

But if I were to venture to take my estimate with a view more immediately evangelical; if I presumed to look for that genuine Christianity which consists in "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;" to insist that, whatever *natural* religion and *fashionable* religion may teach, it is the peculiarity of the *Christian* religion to humble the sinner and exalt the Saviour; to insist that not only the grossly flagitious, but that *all* have sinned; that *all* are by nature in a state of condemnation; that *all* stand in need of mercy, of which there is no hope but on the Gospel terms; that eternal life is promised to those *only* who accept it on the offered conditions of "faith, repentance, and renewed obedience;"—if I were to insist on such evidences of our Christianity as these; if I were to express these doctrines in plain scriptural terms, without lowering, qualifying, disguising, or doing them away; if I were to insist on this belief, and its implied and corresponding practices; I am aware that, with whatever condescending patience this little tract might have been so far perused, many a fashionable reader would here throw it aside, as having now detected the palpable enthusiast, the abettor of "strange doctrines," long ago consigned over by the liberal and the polite to bigots and fanatics. And yet, if the Bible be true, this is a simple and faithful description of Christianity.

Surely men forget that we are urging them upon their own principles; that while we are pressing them with motives drawn from Christianity, they seem to have as little concern in those motives as if they themselves were of another religion. It is not a name that will stand us in stead. It is not merely glorying in the title of Christians, while we are living in the neglect of its doctrines and its precepts; it is not valuing ourselves on the profession of religion as creditable, while we reject the power of it as fanatical, that will save us. In any other circumstance of life it would be accounted absurd to adopt a set of propositions, principles, statutes, or fundamental articles, and not to make them the ground of our acting as well as of our reasoning. In these supposed instances the blame would lie in the contradiction; in religion it lies in the agreement. Strange, that to act in consequence of received and acknowledged principles should be accounted weakness! Strange, that what alone is truly consistent should be branded as absurd! Strange, that men must really forbear to act rationally, only that they may not be reckoned mad! Strange, that they should be commended for having prayed in the excellent words of the Bible and of our church for "a clean heart, and a right spirit;" and yet, if they gave any sign of such a transformation of heart, they should be accounted, if not fanatical, at least, singular, weak, or melancholy men!

After having, however, just ventured to hint at what are indeed the humbling doctrines of the Gospel, the doctrines to which alone eternal life is promised, I shall in deep humility forbear to enlarge on this part of the subject, which has been exhausted by the labours of wise and pious men in all ages. Unhappily, however, the most awakening of these writers are not the favourite guests in the closets of the more fashionable Christians; who, when they happen to be more seriously disposed than ordinary, are fond of finding out some middle kind of theology, which recommends some half-way state, something between paganism and Christianity, suspending the mind, like the position of Mahomet's tomb, between earth and heaven:—a kind of reading which, while it quiets the conscience by being on the side of morals, neither awakens fear nor alarms security. By dealing in generals, it comes home to the hearts of none: it flatters the passions of the reader, by ascribing high merit to the performance of certain right actions, and the forbearance from certain wrong ones; among which, that reader must be very unlucky, indeed, who does not find some performances and some forbearances of his own. It at once enables him to keep heaven in his eye, and the world in his heart. It agreeably represents the readers to themselves as amiable persons, guilty, indeed, of a few faults, but never as condemned sinners under sentence of death. It commonly abounds

with high encomiums on the dignity of human nature; the good effects of virtue on health, fortune, and reputation; the dangers of a blind zeal, the mischiefs of enthusiasm, and the folly of singularity, with various other kindred sentiments; which, if they do not always fall in of themselves with the corruptions of our nature, may, by a little warping, be easily accommodated to them.

These are the too successful practices of certain lukewarm and temporising divines, who have become popular by blunting the edge of that heavenly-tempered weapon, whose salutary keenness, but for their "deceitful handling," would oftener "pierce to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit."

But those severer preachers of righteousness, who disgust by applying too closely to the conscience; who probe the inmost heart, and lay open all its latent peccancies; who treat of principles as the only certain source of manners; who lay the axe to the root oftener than the pruning knife to the branch; who insist much and often on the great leading truths, that man is a fallen creature, who must be restored, if he be restored at all, by means very little flattering to human pride, — such heart-searching writers as these will seldom find access to the houses and hearts of the more modish Christians, unless they happen to owe their admission to some subordinate quality

of style; unless they can captivate, with the seducing graces of language, those well-bred readers, who are childishly amusing themselves with the garnish, when they are perishing for want of food; who are searching for polished periods, when they should be in quest of alarming truths; who are looking for elegance of composition, when they should be anxious for eternal life.

Whatever comparative praise may be due to the former class of writers, when viewed with others of a less decent order, yet I am not sure whether so many books of frigid morality, exhibiting such inferior motives of action, such moderate representations of faith and holiness, and such a low standard of principle, have not done religion much more harm than good; whether they do not lead many a reader to enquire what is the lowest degree in the scale of virtue with which he may content himself, so as barely to escape eternal punishment; how much indulgence he may allow himself, without absolutely forfeiting his chance of safety; what is the uttermost verge to which he may venture of this world's enjoyment, and yet just keep within a possibility of hope for the next: adjusting the scales of indulgence and security with such a scrupulous equilibrium, as not to lose much pleasuse, yet not incur much penalty.

This is hardly an exaggerated representation; and to these low views of religion is partly

owing so much of that bare-weight virtue with which even Christians are so apt to content themselves; fighting for every inch of ground which may possibly be taken within the pales of permission, and stretching those pales to the utmost edge of that limitation about which the world and the Bible contend.

But while the nominal Christian is persuading himself that there can be no harm in going *a little further*, the real Christian is always afraid of going too far. While the one is debating for a little more disputed ground, the other is so fearful of straying into the regions of unallowed indulgence, that he keeps at a prudent distance from the extremity of his permitted limits; and is as anxious in restricting as the other is desirous of extending them. One thing is clear, and it may be no bad indication by which to discover the state of a man's heart to himself; while he is contending for this allowance, and stipulating for the other indulgence, it will show him that, whatever change there may be in his life, there is none in his heart; the temper remains as it did; and it is by the inward frame, rather than the outward act, that he can best judge of his *own* state, whatever may be the rule by which he undertakes to judge of that of another.

It is less wonderful that there are not more Christians than that Christians, as they are called, are not better men; for if Christianity

be not true, the human motives to virtue are not high enough to quicken ordinary men to very extraordinary exertions. We see them do and suffer every day for popularity, for custom, for fashion, for the point of honour, not only more than good men do and suffer for religion, but a great deal more than religion requires them to do. For her *reasonable service* demands no sacrifices but what are sanctioned by good sense, sound policy, right reason, and uncorrupt judgment.

Many of these fashionable professors even go so far as to bring their right faith as an apology for their wrong practice. They have a commodious way of intrenching themselves within the shelter of some general position of unquestionable truth: even the great Christian hope becomes a snare to them. They apologise for a life of offence, by taking refuge in the supreme goodness they are abusing. That "God is all merciful," is the common reply to those who hint to them their danger. This is a false and fatal application of a Divine and comfortable truth. Nothing can be more certain than the proposition, nor more delusive than the inference; for their deduction implies, not that he is merciful to sin repented of, but to sin continued in. But it is a most fallacious hope to expect that God will violate his own covenant, or that he is, indeed, "all mercy," to the utter

exclusion of his other attributes of perfect holiness, purity, and justice.

It is a dangerous folly to rest on these vague and general notions of unlimited mercy; and nothing can be more delusive than this indefinite trust in being forgiven in our *own* way, after God has clearly revealed to us that he will only forgive us in *his* way. Besides, is there not something singularly base in sinning against God *because* he is merciful?

But the truth is, no one does truly trust in God who does not endeavour to obey him. For to break his laws, and yet to depend on his favour; to live in opposition to his will, and yet in expectation of his mercy; to violate his commands, and yet look for his acceptance,—would not, in any other instance, be thought a reasonable ground of conduct; and yet it is by no means as uncommon as it is inconsistent.

CHAP. VII.

VIEW OF THOSE WHO ACKNOWLEDGE CHRISTIANITY AS A PERFECT SYSTEM OF MORALS, BUT DENY ITS DIVINE AUTHORITY. — MORALITY NOT THE WHOLE OF RELIGION.

As in the preceding chapter notice was taken of that description of persons who profess to receive Christianity with great reverence as a matter of faith, who yet do not pretend to adopt it as a rule of conduct, I shall conclude these slight remarks with some short animadversions on another set of men, and that not a small one, among the decent and the fashionable, who profess to think it exhibits an admirable system of morals, while they deny its Divine authority; though that authority alone can make the necessity of obeying its precepts binding on the consciences of men.

This is a very discreet scheme: for such persons at once save themselves from the discredit of having their understanding imposed upon by a supposed blind submission to evidences and authorities; and yet, prudently enough, secure to themselves, in no small degree, the reputation of good men. By steering this middle kind of course, they contrive to be

reckoned liberal by the *philosophers*, and decent by the believers.

But we are not to expect to see the pure morality of the Gospel very carefully transfused into the lives of such objectors; and, indeed, it would be unjust to imagine that the precepts *should* be most scrupulously observed by those who reject the authority. The influence of Divine truth must necessarily best prepare the heart for an unreserved obedience to its laws. If we do not depend on the promises of the Gospel, we shall want the best motive to the actions and performances which it enjoins. A lively belief *must*, therefore, precede a hearty obedience. Let those who think otherwise hear what the Saviour of the world has said: "For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth." Those who reject the Gospel, therefore, reject the *power* of performing good actions. That command, for instance, to set "our affections on things above," will operate but faintly, till that Spirit from which the command proceeds touches the heart, and convinces it that no human good is worthy of the entire affection of an immortal creature. An unreserved faith in the promiser *must* precede our acceptable performance of any duty to which the promise is annexed.

But as to a set of duties enforced by no other motive than a bare acquiescence in their beauty,

and a cold conviction of their propriety, but impelled by no obedience to his authority who imposes them; though we know not how well they might be performed by pure and impeccable beings, yet we know how they commonly *are* performed by frail and disorderly creatures, fallen from their innocence, and radically corrupt in their very natures.

Nothing but a conviction of the truth of Christianity can reconcile thinking beings to the extraordinary appearances of things in the Creator's moral government of the world. The works of God are an enigma, of which his word alone is the solution. The dark veil which is frequently thrown over the Divine dispensations in this lower world must naturally shock those who consider only the single scene which is acting on the present stage; but is quite reconcilable to him who, having learnt from Revelation the nature of the laws by which the great Author acts, trusts confidently that the catastrophe will set all to rights. The confusion which sin and the pasions have introduced; the triumph of wickedness; the seemingly arbitrary disproportion of human conditions, accountable on no scheme but that which the Gospel has opened to us, — have all a natural tendency to withdraw from the love of God the hearts of those who erect themselves into critics on the Divine conduct, and yet will not study the plan, and get acquainted with the rules, so far as it

has pleased the Supreme Disposer to reveal them.

Till, therefore, the word of God is used as "a lamp to their paths," men can neither truly discern the crookedness of their own ways, nor the perfection of that light by which they are directed to walk. And this light can only be seen by its own proper brightness: it has no other medium. Until, therefore, "the secret of the Lord" is with men, they will not truly "fear him;" until he has "enlarged their hearts" with the knowledge and belief of his word, they will not very vigorously run "the way of his commandments." Until they have acquired that "faith, without which it is impossible to please God," they will not attain that "holiness, without which no man can see him."

And, indeed, if God has thought fit to make the Gospel an instrument of salvation, we must own the necessity of receiving it as a Divine institution, before it is likely to operate very effectually on the human conduct. The great Creator, if we may judge by analogy from natural things, is so just and wise an economist, that he always adapts, with the most accurate precision, the instrument to the work; and never lavishes more means than are necessary to accomplish the proposed end. If, therefore, Christianity had been intended for nothing more than a mere system of ethics, such a system surely might have been produced at an infinitely less

expense. The long chain of prophecy, the succession of miracles, the labours of apostles, the blood of the saints, to say nothing of the great and costly sacrifice which the Gospel records, might surely have been spared. Lessons of mere human virtue might have been delivered by some suitable instrument of human wisdom, strengthened by the visible authority of human power. A bare system of morals might have been communicated to mankind with a more reasonable prospect of advantage, by means not so repugnant to human pride. A mere scheme of conduct might have been delivered with far greater probability of the success of its reception by Antoninus the emperor, or Plato the philosopher, than by Paul the tent-maker, or Peter the fisherman.

Christianity, then, must be embraced entirely, if it be received at all. It must be taken, without mutilation, as a perfect scheme, in the way in which God has been pleased to reveal it. It must be accepted, not as exhibiting beautiful parts, but as presenting one consummate whole, of which the perfection arises from coherence and dependence, from relation and consistency. Its power will be weakened, and its energy destroyed, if every caviller pulls out a pin, or obstructs a spring with the presumptuous view of new-modelling the Divine work, and making it go to his own mind. There must be no breaking this system into portions, of which we are at

liberty to choose one and reject another. There is no separating the evidences from the doctrines, the doctrines from the precepts, belief from obedience, morality from piety, the love of our neighbour from the love of God. If we allow Christianity to be any thing, we must allow it to be every thing: if we allow the Divine Author to be, indeed, unto us "wisdom and righteousness," he must be also "sanctification and redemption."

Christianity, then, is assuredly something more than a mere set of rules; and faith, though it never pretended to be the substitute for an useful life, is indispensably necessary to its acceptance with God. The Gospel never offers to make religion supersede morality, but every where clearly proves that morality is not the whole of religion. Piety is not only necessary as a *means*, but is itself a most important *end*. It is not only the best principle of moral conduct, but is an indispensable and absolute duty in itself. It is not only the highest motive to the practice of virtue, but is a prior obligation, and absolutely necessary, even when detached from its immediate influence on outward actions. Religion will survive all the virtues of which it is the source; for we shall be living in the noblest exercises of piety when we shall have no objects on which to exercise many human virtues. When there will be no distress to be relieved, no injuries to be forgiven, no evil habits to be subdued, there will be a Creator to be blessed

and adored, a Redeemer to be loved and praised.

To conclude, — a real Christian is not such merely by habit, profession, or education; he is not a Christian in order to acquit his sponsors of the engagements they entered into in his name; but he is one who has embraced Christianity from a conviction of its truth, and an experience of its excellence. He is not only confident in matters of faith by evidences suggested to his understanding, or reasons which correspond to his enquiries; but all these evidences of truth, all these principles of goodness, are by the grace of God worked into his heart, and exhibit themselves in his practice. He sees so much of the body of the great truths and fundamental points of religion, that he has a satisfactory trust in those lesser branches which ramify to infinity from the parent stock, though he may not individually and completely comprehend them all. He is so powerfully convinced of the general truth, and so deeply impressed by the general spirit of the Gospel, that he is not startled by every little difficulty, he is not staggered by every "hard saying." Those depths of mystery which surpass his understanding do not shake his faith; and this, not because he is credulous, and given to take things upon trust, but because, knowing that his foundations are right, he sees how one truth of Scripture supports another, like the bearings of a geometrical

building; because he sees the aspect one doctrine has upon another; because he sees the consistency of each with the rest, and the place, order, and relation of the whole. The real Christian by no means rejects reason from his religion; so far from it, he most carefully exercises it in furnishing his mind with all the evidences of its truth. But he does not stop here. Christianity furnishes him with a living principle of action, with the vital influences of the Holy Spirit, which, while it enlightens his faculties, rectifies his will, turns his knowledge into practice, sanctifies his heart, changes his habits, and proves, that when faithfully received, the word of truth "is life indeed, and is spirit indeed!"

REMARKS

ON THE

SPEECH OF M. DUPONT,

MADE IN THE

NATIONAL CONVENTION OF FRANCE,

ON THE SUBJECTS OF

RELIGION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION.

☞ *The Profits of this Publication, which were considerable, were given to the* FRENCH EMIGRANT CLERGY.

A

PREFATORY ADDRESS

TO THE

LADIES, &c. OF GREAT BRITAIN,

IN BEHALF OF THE

FRENCH EMIGRANT CLERGY.

If it be allowed that there may arise occasions so extraordinary, that all the lesser motives of delicacy ought to vanish before them; it is presumed that the present emergency will be considered as presenting one of those occasions, and will in some measure justify the hardiness of this Address from a private individual, who, stimulated by the urgency of the case, sacrifices inferior considerations to the ardent desire of raising further supplies towards relieving a distress as pressing as it is unexampled.

We are informed by public advertisement, that the large sums already so liberally subscribed for the emigrant French clergy are almost exhausted. Authentic information adds, that multitudes of distressed exiles in the

island of Jersey are on the point of wanting bread.

Very many to whom this Address is made have already contributed. Oh, let them not be weary in well-doing! I know that many are making generous exertions for the just and imperative claims of the widows and children of our own brave seamen and soldiers. Let it not be said, that the present is an *interfering* claim. Those to whom I write have bread enough, and to spare. You, who fare sumptuously every day, and yet complain that you have little to bestow, let not the bounty now solicited be subtracted from another bounty, but subtract it rather from some superfluous expense.

The beneficent and right-minded want no arguments to be pressed upon them; but it is not those alone whom I address; I write to persons of every description. The prevailing luxurious habits of living, which really furnish the distressed with the fairest grounds for application, are too often urged by those who practise them as a motive for withholding assistance, and produced as a plea for having little to spare. Let her who indulges such habits, and pleads such excuses in consequence, reflect, that by retrenching *one* costly dish from her abundant table, by cutting off the superfluities of *one* expensive desert, omitting *one* evening's public amusement, she may furnish at least a week's

subsistence to more than one person *, as liberally bred, perhaps, as herself, and who, in his own country, may have often tasted how much more blessed it is to give than to receive, — to a once affluent minister of religion, who has been long accustomed to bestow the necessaries he is now reduced to solicit.

Even your young daughters, whom maternal prudence has not yet furnished with the means of bestowing, may be cheaply taught the first rudiments of charity, together with an important lesson of economy: they may be taught to sacrifice a feather, a set of ribands, an expensive ornament, an idle diversion. And if they are on this occasion instructed, that there is no true charity without self-denial, they will *gain* more than they are called upon to *give:* for the suppression of one luxury for a charitable purpose is the exercise of two virtues at once, and this without any pecuniary expense: — an indulgence is abridged, and Christian charity is exercised.

Let the sick and afflicted remember how dreadful it must be to be exposed to the sufferings they feel without one of the alleviations which mitigate *their* affliction. How dreadful it is to be without comforts, without necessaries, without a home, — *without a country!* While

* Mr. Bowdler's letter states, that about six shillings a week includes the expenses of each priest at Winchester.

the gay and prosperous would do well to recollect, how suddenly and terribly those unhappy persons for whom we plead were, by the surprising vicissitudes of life, thrown down from heights of gaiety and prosperity equal to what *they* are now enjoying. And let those who have husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, or friends, reflect on the uncertainties of war, and the revolution of human affairs. It is only by imagining the possibility that those who are dear to us may be placed by the instability of human events in the same calamitous circumstances, that we can obtain an adequate feeling of the woes we are called upon to commiserate.

In a distress so wide and comprehensive as the present, many are prevented from giving by that popular excuse, — "That it is but a drop of water in the ocean." But let them reflect, that if all the individual drops were withheld, there would be no ocean at all; and the inability to give much ought not, on any occasion, to be converted into an excuse for giving nothing. Even moderate circumstances need not plead an exemption. The industrious tradesman will not, even in a political view, be eventually a loser by his small contribution. The money now raised is neither carried out of our country nor dissipated in luxuries, but returns again to the community; returns to our shops and to our markets, to procure the bare necessaries of life.

Some have objected to the difference of *reli-*

gion of those for whom we solicit. Such an objection hardly deserves a serious answer. Surely if the superstitious Tartar hopes to become possessed of the courage and talents of the enemy he slays, the Christian is not afraid of catching, or of propagating, the error of the sufferer he relieves. Christian charity is of no party. We plead not for their faith, but for their wants. But while we affirm that it is not for their popery but their poverty for which we solicit; yet let the more scrupulous, who look for desert as well as distress in the objects of their bounty, bear in mind, that if these men could have sacrificed their conscience to their convenience they had not now been in this country; and if we wish for proselytes, who knows but it may be the first step towards their conversion, if we show them the purity of our religion, by the beneficence of our actions.

If you will permit me to press upon you such high motives (and it were to be wished that in every action we were to be influenced only by the highest), perhaps no act of bounty to which you may be called out can ever come so immediately, and so literally under that solemn and affecting description, which will be recorded in the great day of account, — *I was a stranger, and ye took me in.*

The following is an exact Translation from a SPEECH *made in the National Convention at Paris, on Friday the 14th of December, 1792, in a Debate on the Subject of establishing Public Schools for the Education of Youth, by Citizen* DUPONT, *a Member of considerable Weight; and as the Doctrines contained in it were received with unanimous Applause, except from two or three of the Clergy, it may be fairly considered as an Exposition of the Creed of that enlightened Assembly. Translated from* Le Moniteur *of Sunday the 16th of December, 1792.*

WHAT! thrones are overturned! sceptres broken! kings expire! and yet the altars of GOD remain! (Here there is a murmur from some members; and the Abbé ICHON demands that the person speaking may be called to order.) Tyrants, in outrage to nature, continue to burn an impious incense on those altars! (Some murmurs arise, but they are lost in the applauses from the majority of the Assembly.) The thrones that have been reversed have left these altars naked, unsupported, and tottering. A single

breath of enlightened reason will now be sufficient to make them disappear; and if humanity is under obligations to the French nation for the first of these benefits, the fall of kings, can it be doubted but that the French people, now sovereign, will be wise enough, in like manner, to overthrow those altars and *those idols* to which those kings have hitherto made them subject? *Nature* and *Reason*, these ought to be the gods of men! These are my gods! (Here the Abbé AUDREIN cried out, "There is no bearing this," and rushed out of the Assembly. — A great laugh.) Admire *nature*, — cultivate *reason*. — And you, legislators, if you desire that the French people should be happy, make haste to propagate these principles, and to teach them in your primary schools, instead of those fanatical principles which have hitherto been taught. The tyranny of kings was confined to make their people miserable in this life, — but those other tyrants, the priests, extend their dominion into another, of which they have no other idea than of eternal punishments; a doctrine which some men have hitherto had the good nature to believe. But the moment of the catastrophe is come, — all these prejudices must fall at the same time. *We must destroy them, or they will destroy us.* — For myself, I honestly avow to the Convention, *I am an atheist!* (Here there is some noise and tumult. But a great number of mem-

bers cry out, "What is that to us?—you are an honest man!") But I defy a single individual, amongst the twenty-four millions of Frenchmen, to make against me any well-grounded reproach. I doubt whether the Christians or the Catholics, of which the last speaker, and those of his opinion, have been talking to us, can make the same challenge.—(Great applauses.) There is another consideration,—Paris has had great losses. It has been deprived of the commerce of luxury; of that factitious splendour which was found at courts, and invited strangers hither. Well! We must repair these losses.—Let me, then, represent to you the times that are fast approaching, when our philosophers, whose names are celebrated throughout Europe,—PETION, SYEYES, CONDORCET, and others,—surrounded in our Pantheon, as the Greek philosophers were at Athens, with a crowd of disciples coming from all parts of Europe, walking like the Peripatetics, and teaching,—this man, the system of the universe, and developing the progress of all human knowledge; that, perfectioning the social system, and showing in our decree of the 17th of June, 1789, the seeds of the insurrections of the 14th of July, and the 10th of August, and of all those insurrections which are spreading with such rapidity throughout Europe;—so that these young strangers, on their return to their respective countries, may spread the same lights,

and may operate, *for the happiness of mankind*, similar revolutions throughout the world.

(Numberless applauses arose, almost throughout the whole Assembly, and in the galleries.)

REMARKS

ON THE

SPEECH OF M. DUPONT,

ON THE SUBJECTS OF

RELIGION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION.

It is presumed that it may not be thought unseasonable at this critical time to offer to the public, and especially to the more religious part of it, a few slight observations, occasioned by the late famous speech of Mr. Dupont, which exhibits the confession of faith of a considerable member of the French National Convention. Though the speech itself has been pretty generally read, yet it was thought necessary to prefix it to these remarks, lest such as have not already perused it might, from an honest reluctance to credit the existence of such principles, dispute its authenticity, and accuse these remarks, if unaccompanied by the speech, of a spirit of invective and unfair exaggeration. At the same

time it must be confessed, that its impiety is so monstrous, that many good men were of opinion it ought not to be made familiar to the minds of Englishmen; for there are crimes with which even the imagination should never come in contact, and which it is almost safer not to controvert than to detail.

But as an ancient nation intoxicated their slaves, and then exposed them before their children, in order to increase their horror of intemperance, so it is hoped that this piece of impiety may be placed in such a light before the eyes of the Christian reader, that, in proportion as his detestation is raised, his faith, instead of being shaken, will be only so much the more strengthened.

This celebrated speech, though delivered in an assembly of politicians, is not on a question of politics, but on one as superior to all political considerations as the soul is to the body, as eternity is to time. The object of this oration is not to dethrone kings, but HIM by whom kings reign. It does not excite the cry of indignation in the orator that *Louis* the Sixteenth reigns, but that *the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

Nor is this the declaration of some obscure and anonymous person, but it is an exposition of the creed of a public leader. It is not a sentiment hinted in a journal, hazarded in a pamphlet, or thrown out at a disputing club;

but it is the implied faith of the rulers of a great nation.

Little notice would have been due to this famous speech if it had conveyed the sentiments of only *one* vain orator; but it should be observed, that it was heard, received, *applauded*, with two or three exceptions only, — a fact which you, who have scarcely believed in the existence of atheism, will hardly credit, and which, for the honour of the eighteenth century, it is hoped that our posterity will reject as totally incredible.

A love of liberty, generous in its principle, inclines some well-meaning but mistaken men still to favour the proceedings of the National Convention of France. They do not yet perceive that the licentious wildness which has been excited in that country is destructive of all true happiness, and no more resembles liberty than the tumultuous joys of the drunkard resemble the cheerfulness of a sober and well-regulated mind.

To those who do not know of what strange inconsistences man is made up; who have not considered how some persons, having at first been hastily and heedlessly drawn in as approvers, by a sort of natural progression, soon become principals: — to those who have never observed by what a variety of strange associations in the mind opinions that seem the most irreconcilable meet at some unsuspected turning,

and come to be united in the same man; — to all such it may appear quite incredible, that well-meaning and even pious people should continue to applaud the principles of a set of men who have publicly made known their intention of abolishing Christianity, as far as the demolition of altars, priests, temples, and institutions, *can* abolish it. As to the religion itself, this also they may traduce and reject; but we know, from the comfortable promise of an authority still sacred in this country at least, that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Let me not be misunderstood by those to whom these slight remarks are principally addressed,— by that class of well-intentioned but ill-judging people, who favour at least, if they do not adopt, the prevailing sentiments of the new Republic. You are not here accused of being the wilful abettors of infidelity. God forbid! "we are persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation." But this *ignis fatuus* of liberty and universal brotherhood, which the French are madly pursuing, with the insignia of freedom in one hand, and the bloody bayonet in the other, has bewitched your senses, is misleading your steps, and betraying you to ruin. You are gazing at a meteor raised by the vapours of vanity, which these wild and infatuated wanderers are pursuing to their destruction; and though for a moment you mistake it for a heaven-born light,

which leads to the perfection of human freedom, you will, should you join in the mad pursuit, soon discover that it will conduct you over dreary wilds and sinking bogs, only to plunge you in deep and inevitable destruction.

Much, very much, is to be said in vindication of your favouring, in the *first instance*, their political projects. The cause they took in hand seemed to be the great cause of human kind. Its very name insured its popularity. What English heart did not exult at the demolition of the Bastile? What lover of his species did not triumph in the warm hope, that one of the finest countries in the world would soon be one of the most free? Popery and despotism, though chained by the gentle influence of Louis the Sixteenth, had actually slain their thousands. Little was it then imagined, that anarchy and atheism, the monsters who were about to succeed them, would soon slay their ten thousands. If we cannot regret the defeat of the two former tyrants, what must they be who can triumph in the mischiefs of the two latter? Who, I say, that had a head to reason, or a heart to feel, did not glow with the hope, that from the ruins of tyranny, and the rubbish of popery, a beautiful and finely-framed edifice would in time have been constructed, and that ours would not have been the only country in which the patriot's fair idea of well-understood liberty, the politician's view of a perfect constitution, together

with the establishment of a pure and reasonable, a sublime and rectified, Christianity, might be realised?

But, alas! it frequently happens that the wise and good are not the most adventurous in attacking the mischiefs which they are the first to perceive and lament. With a timidity in some respects virtuous, they fear attempting any thing which may possibly aggravate the evils they deplore, or put to hazard the blessings they already enjoy. They dread plucking up the wheat with the tares, and are rather apt, with a spirit of hopeless resignation,

> "To bear the ills they have,
> Than fly to others that they know not of."

While sober-minded and considerate men, therefore, sat mourning over this complicated mass of error, and waited till God, in his own good time, should open the blind eyes, the vast scheme of reformation was left to that set of rash and presumptuous adventurers, who are generally watching how they may convert public grievances to their own personal account. It was undertaken, not upon the broad basis of a wise and well-digested scheme, of which all the parts should contribute to the perfection of one consistent whole: it was carried on, not by those steady measures, founded on rational deliberation, which are calculated to accomplish so important an end; not with a temperance

which indicated a sober love of law, or a sacred regard for religion; but with the most extravagant lust of power, with the most inordinate vanity which, perhaps, ever instigated human measures, — a lust of power which threatens to extend its desolating influence over the whole globe; — a vanity of the same destructive species with that which stimulated the celebrated incendiary of Ephesus, who, being weary of his native obscurity and insignificance, and preferring infamy to oblivion, could contrive no other road to fame and immortality than that of setting fire to the exquisite Temple of Diana. He *was* remembered, indeed, as he desired to be, but it was only to be execrated,— while the seventh wonder of the world lay prostrate through his crime.

But too often that daring boldness which excites admiration is not energy, is not virtue, is not genius. It is blindness in the judgment, it is vanity in the heart. Strong and unprecedented measures, plans instantaneously conceived, and as rapidly executed, argue, not ability, but arrogance. A mind continually driven out in quest of presumptuous novelties is commonly a mind void of real resources within, and incapable of profiting from observation without. New principles cannot be ascertained without experiment, and experiment requires more time than the sanguine can spare, and more patience than the vain possess. In the crude speculations of these rash reformists,

few obstructions occur. It is like taking a journey, not on a road, but on a map. Difficulties are unseen, or are kept in the back-ground. Impossibilities are smothered, or rather they are not suffered to be born. Nothing is felt but the ardour of enterprise, nothing is seen but the certainty of success. Whereas, if difficulties grow out of sober experiment, the disappointments attending them generate humility: the failures inseparable from the best-concerted human undertakings serve at once to multiply resources, and to excite self-distrust; while ideal projectors, and actual demolishers, are the most conceited of mortals. It never occurs to them that those defects of old institutions, on which they frame their objections, are equally palpable to all other men. It never occurs to them that frenzy can demolish faster than wisdom can build; that pulling down the strongest edifice is far more easy than the reconstruction of the meanest; that the most ignorant labourer is competent to the one, while, for the other, the skill of the architect and the patient industry of the workman must unite; that a sound judgment will profit by the errors of our predecessors, as well as by their excellences; that there is a retrospective wisdom to which much of our prospective wisdom owes its birth,—and that, after all, neither the perfection pretended to, nor the pride which accompanies the pretension, "is made for man."

It is the same over-ruling vanity which operates in their politics, and in their religion, which makes Kersaint * boast of carrying his destructive projects from the Tagus to the Brazils, and from Mexico to the shores of the Ganges; which makes him menace to outstrip the enterprises of the most extravagant hero of romance, and almost undertake with the marvellous celerity of the nimble-footed Puck,

> " To put a girdle round about the earth
> In forty minutes."

It is the same vanity, still the master-passion in the bosom of a Frenchman, which leads Dupont and Manuel to undertake in their orations to abolish the Sabbath, to exterminate the priesthood, to erect a pantheon for the world, to restore the Peripatetic philosophy, and in short to revive every thing of ancient Greece, except the pure taste, the profound wisdom, the love of virtue, the veneration of the laws, and that high degree of reverence which even virtuous pagans professed for the Deity.

It is the same spirit of novelty, and the same hostility to established opinions, which dictated the preposterous and impious doctrine that *death is an eternal sleep.* The prophets and apostles assert the contrary. David expressly says, " When I *awake* up after thy likeness I shall be

* See his speech, enumerating their intended projects.

satisfied;" implying, that our true life will begin at our departure out of this world. The destruction or dissolution of the body will be the revival, not the death, of the soul. It is to the *living* the apostle says, "*Awake* thou that *sleepest*, and arise from the DEAD, and Christ shall give thee light."

It is surely to be charged to the inadequate and wretched hands into which the work of reformation fell, and not to the impossibility of amending the civil and religious institutions of France, that all has succeeded so ill. It cannot be denied, perhaps, that a reforming spirit was wanted in that country; their government was not more despotic, than their church was superstitious and corrupt.

But though this is readily granted, and though it may be unfair to blame those who in the *first outset* of the French Revolution rejoiced even on religious motives, yet it is astonishing how any pious person, even with all the blinding power of prejudice, can think without horror of the *present* state of France. It is no less wonderful how any rational man could, even in the beginning of the Revolution, transfer that reasoning, however just it might be when applied to France, to the case of England. For what can be more unreasonable than to draw from different, and even opposite, premises the same conclusion? Must a revolution be equally necessary in the case of two sorts of government and two

sorts of religion, which are the very antipodes of each other? — opposite in their genius, unlike in their fundamental principles, and completely different in each of their component parts.

That despotism, priestcraft, intolerance, and superstition, are terrible evils, no candid Christian, it is presumed, will deny; but, blessed be God, though these mischiefs are not yet entirely banished from the face of the earth, they have scarcely any existence in our happy country.

To guard against a real danger, and to cure actual abuses, of which the existence has been first plainly proved, by the application of a suitable remedy, requires diligence as well as courage; observation as well as genius; patience and temperance as well as zeal and spirit. It requires the union of that clear head and sound heart which constitute the true patriot. But to conjure up fancied evils, or even greatly to aggravate real ones, and then to exhaust our labour in combating them, is the characteristic of a distempered imagination and an ill-governed spirit.

Romantic crusades, the ordeal trial, drowning of witches, the torture, and the inquisition, have been justly reprobated as the foulest stains of the respective periods in which, to the disgrace of human reason, they existed; but would any man be rationally employed, who should now stand up gravely to declaim against these as the predominating mischiefs of the present century?

Even the whimsical knight of La Mancha himself would not fight windmills that were pulled down; yet I will venture to say, that the above-named evils are at present little more chimerical than some of those now so bitterly complained of among us. It is not, as Dryden said, when one of his works was unmercifully abused, that the piece has not faults enough in it, but the critics have not had the wit to fix upon the right ones.

It is allowed that, as a nation, we do not want faults; but our political critics err in the objects of their censure. They say little of those real and pressing evils resulting from our own corruption, of that depravity which constitutes the actual miseries of life; while they gloomily speculate upon a thousand imaginary political grievances, and fancy that the reformation of our rulers and our legislators is all that is wanting to make us a happy people. Alas!

> How small, of all that human hearts endure,
> That part, which kings or laws can cause, or cure!

The principles of just and equitable government were, perhaps, never more fully established, nor was public justice ever more exactly administered. Pure and undefiled religion was never laid more open to all than at this day. I wish I could say we were a religious people; but this at least may be safely asserted, that the great truths of religion were never better understood;

that Christianity was never more completely stripped from all its incumbrances and disguises, or more thoroughly purged from human infusions, and from whatever is debasing in human institutions, than it is at this day in this country.

In vain we look around us to discover the ravages of religious tyranny, or the triumphs of priestcraft or superstition. Who attempts to impose any yoke upon our reason? Who seeks to put any blind on the eyes of the most illiterate? Who fetters the judgment or enslaves the conscience of the meanest of our Protestant brethren? Nay, such is the power of pure Christianity, that genuine Christianity which is exhibited in our liturgy to enlighten the understanding, as well as to reform the heart; and such are the advantages which the most abject in this country possess for enjoying its privileges, that the poorest peasant among us, if he be as religious as multitudes of his station really are, has clearer ideas of God and his own soul, purer notions of that true liberty wherewith Christ has made him free, than the mere disputer of this world, though he possess every splendid advantage which education, wisdom, and genius can bestow. I am not speaking either of a *perfect* form of government, or a *perfect* church establishment, because I am speaking of institutions which are human; and the very idea of their being human involves also the idea of imperfection. But I am speaking of the best constituted

government, and the best constituted national church with which the history of mankind is yet acquainted. Time, that silent instructor; and experience, that great rectifier of the judgment, will more and more discover to us what is wanting to the perfection of both. And if we may trust to the active genius of Christian liberty, and to that liberal and candid spirit which is the characteristic of the age we live in, there is little doubt but that a temperate and well-regulated zeal will, at a convenient season, correct whatsoever sound policy shall suggest as wise and expedient to be corrected.

If there are errors in the church, and it does not perhaps require the sharp-sightedness of a keen opposer to discover that there are, there is at least nothing like fierce intolerance, or spiritual usurpation. A fiery zeal and an uncharitable bigotry might have furnished matter for a well-deserved ecclesiastical philippic in other times; but, thanks to the temper of the present day, unless we conjure up a spirit of religious chivalry, and sally forth in quest of imaginary evils, we shall not apprehend any danger from persecution or enthusiasm. If grievances there are, they do not appear to be those which result from polemical pride and rigid bigotry, but are of a kind far different.

If the warm sun of prosperity has unhappily produced its too common effect, that of relaxing the vigour of religious exertion; if, in too many

instances, security has engendered sloth, and affluence produced dissipation; let us implore the Divine grace, that the present alarming crisis may arouse the careless, and quicken the supine; that our pastors may be convinced that the church has less to fear from external violence than from internal decay; nay, that even the violence of attack is often really beneficial, by exciting that activity which enables us to repel danger, and that increase of diligence is the truest accession of strength. May they be convinced that the love of power, with which their enemies, perhaps, unjustly accuse them, is not more fatal than the love of pleasure; that no stoutness of orthodoxy in opinion can atone for a too close assimilation with the manners of the world; that heresy without is less to be dreaded than indifference from within; that the most regular clerical education, the most scrupulous attention to forms, and even the strictest conformity to the established discipline and opinions of the church, will avail but little to the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, without a strict spirit of personal watchfulness, habitual self-denial, and laborious exertion.

Though it is not here intended to animadvert on any political complaint which is not in some sort connected with religion, yet it is presumed it may not be thought quite foreign to the present purpose to remark, that among the reigning complaints against our civil administration, the

most plausible seems to be that excited by the supposed danger of an invasion on the liberty of the press. Were this apprehension well founded, we should indeed be threatened by one of the most grievous misfortunes that can befall a free country. The liberty of the press is not only a most noble privilege itself, but the guardian of all our other liberties and privileges, and, notwithstanding the abuse which has lately been made of this valuable possession, yet every man of a sound unprejudiced mind is well aware that true liberty of every kind is scarcely inferior in importance to any object for which human activity can contend. Nay, the very abuse of a good often makes us more sensible of the value of the good itself. Fair and well-proportioned Freedom will ever retain all her native beauty to a judicious eye, nor will the genuine loveliness of her form be the less prized for our having lately contemplated the distorted features and false colouring of her caricature, as presented to us by the daubing hand of Gallic patriots.

But highly as the freedom of the press ought to be valued, would it really be so very heavy a misfortune, if corrupt and inflammatory publications, calculated to destroy that virtue which every good man is anxious to preserve, that peace which every honest man is struggling to secure, should, just at this alarming period, be somewhat difficult to be obtained? Would it be so very grievous a national calamity, if the

crooked progeny of treason and blasphemy should find it a little inconvenient to venture forth from their lurking-holes, and range abroad in open day? Is the cheapness of poison, or the facility with which it may be obtained, to be reckoned among the real advantages of medicinal repositories? And can the easiness of access to seditious or atheistical writings be seriously numbered among the substantial blessings of any country? Would France, at this day, have had much solid cause of regret, if most of the writings of Voltaire, Rousseau, and D'Alembert, the prolific seed of their wide-spreading tree, had found more difficulty in getting into the world, or been less profusely circulated when in it? And might not England at this moment have been just as happy in her ignorance, if the famous orations of Citizen Dupont and Citizen Manuel had been confined to their own enlightened and philosophical countries? *

* *Extract from Mons. Manuel's Letter to the National Convention, dated January* 26. 1793.

"The priests of a republic are its magistrates, the law its gospel. What mission can be more august than that of the instructors of youth, who, having themselves escaped from the hereditary prejudice of all sects, point out to the human race their inalienable rights, founded upon that sublime wisdom which pervades all nature. Religious faith, impressed on the mind of an infant seven years old, will lead to perfect slavery; for dogmas at that age are only arbitrary commands. Ah! what is belief, without

To return to these orations: — We have too often, in our own nation, seen and deplored the mischiefs of irreligion, arising incidentally from a neglected or an abused education. But what mischiefs will not irreligion produce, when, in the projected schools of France, as announced to us by the two metaphysical legislators above mentioned, impiety shall be taught by SYSTEM? when out of the mouths of babes and sucklings the monstrous opinions, exhibited by Dupont and Manuel, shall be perfected? when the fruits of atheism, dropping from their newly-planted tree of liberty, shall pollute the very fountains of knowledge? when education, being poisoned in all her springs, the rising generation will be taught to look on atheism as decorous, and Christianity as eccentric? when atheism shall

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examination, without conviction? It renders men either melancholy or mad, &c.

"Legislators! Virtue wants neither temples nor synagogues. It is not from priests we learn to do good or noble actions. No religion must be taught in schools which are to be national ones. To prescribe one, would be to prefer it to all others. There history must speak of sects, as she speaks of other events. It would become your wisdom, perhaps, to order that the pupils of the Republic should not enter the temples before the age of seventeen. Reason must not be taken by surprise, &c. Hardly were children born before they fell into the hands of priests, who first blinded their eyes, and then delivered them over to kings. Wherever kings cease to govern, priests must cease to educate."

be considered as a proof of accomplished breeding, and religion as the stamp of a vulgar education? when the regular course of obedience to masters and tutors will consist in renouncing the hope of everlasting happiness, and in deriding the idea of future punishment? when every man and every child, in conformity with the principles professed in the Convention, shall presume to say with his tongue, what hitherto even the fool has only dared to say in his heart, *That there is no God?* *

Christianity, which involves the whole duty of man, divides that duty into two portions, — the love of God, and the love of our neighbour. Now, as these two principles have their being from the same source, and derive their vitality from their union, so impiety furnishes the direct

* It is a remarkable circumstance, that though the French are continually binding themselves by oaths, they have not mentioned the name of God in any oath which has been invented since the Revolution. It may also appear curious to the English reader, that though in almost all the addresses of congratulation, which were sent by the associated clubs from this country to the National Convention, the success of the French arms was in part ascribed to Divine Providence, yet in none of the answers was the least notice ever taken of this. And to show how the same spirit spreads itself among every description of men in France, their Admiral Latouche, after having described the dangers to which his ship was exposed in a storm, says, *We owe our existence to the tutelary genius which watches over the destiny of the French Republic, and the defenders of liberty and equality!!*

converse, — *that* atheism, which destroys all belief in, and of course cuts off all love of and communion with God, disqualifies for the due performance of the duties of civil and social life. There is, in its way, the same consistency, agreement, and uniformity, between the principles which constitute an infidel and a bad member of society, as there is between giving "glory to God in the highest," and exercising "peace and good will to men."

My fellow Christians! This is not a strife of words; this is not a controversy about opinions of comparatively small importance, such as you have been accustomed at home to hear even good men dispute upon, when perhaps they would have acted a more wise and amiable part had they remained silent, sacrificing their mutual differences on the altar of Christian charity: but this bold renunciation of the first great fundamental article of faith, this daring rejection of the Supreme Creator and Ruler of the world, is laying the axe and striking with a vigorous stroke at the root of all human happiness. It is tearing up the very foundation of human hope, and extirpating every true principle of human excellence. It is annihilating the very existence of virtue, by annihilating its motives, its sanctions, its obligations, its object, and its end.

That atheism will be the favoured and the popular tenet in France seems highly probable; whilst in that wild contempt of all religion, which

has lately had the arrogance to call itself toleration, it is not improbable that Christianity itself may be tolerated in that country, as a sect not persecuted, perhaps, but derided. It is, however, far from clear, that this *will* be the case, if the new doctrines should become generally prevalent. Atheists are not without their bigotry; they too have their spirit of exclusion and monopoly in a degree not inferior to the most superstitious monks. And that very spirit of intolerance which is now so much the object of their invective, would, probably, be no less the rule of their practice, if their will should ever be backed by power. It is true that Voltaire and the other great apostles of infidelity have employed all the acuteness of their wit to convince us that irreligion never persecutes. To prove this, every art of false citation, partial extract, suppressed evidence, and gross misrepresentation, has been put in practice. But if this unsupported assertion were true, then Polycarp, Ignatius, Justin, Cyprian, and Basil, did not suffer for the faith once delivered to the saints. Then the famous Christian apologists, most of them learned converts from the pagan philosophy, idly employed their zeal to abate a clamour which did not exist, and to propitiate emperors who did not persecute. Then Tacitus, Trajan, Pliny, and Julian, those bitter enemies to Christianity, are suborned witnesses on her side. Then Ecclesiastical History is a series of

falsehoods, and the Book of Martyrs a legend of romance.*

That one extravagant mischief should produce its opposite, is agreeable to the ordinary course of human events; that to the credulity of a dark and superstitious religion, a wanton contempt of all decency, and an unbridled profaneness, should succeed; that to a government absolutely despotic, an utter abhorrence of all restraint and subordination should follow, though it is deplorable, yet it is not strange. The human mind, in flying from the extreme verge of one error, seldom stops till she has reached the opposite extremity. She generally passes by with a lofty disdain the obvious truth which lies directly in her road, and which is indeed commonly to be found in the mid-way, between the error she is flying from and the error she is pursuing.

Is it a breach of Christian charity to conclude, from a view of the present state of the French, that since that deluded people have given up GOD, GOD, by a righteous retribution, seems to

* It may be objected here, that this is not applicable to the state of France; for that the Roman emperors were not atheists or deists, but polytheists, with an established religion. To this it may be answered, that modern infidels not only deny the ten pagan persecutions, but accuse Christianity of being the only persecuting religion; and affirm, that only those who refuse to embrace it discover a spirit of toleration.

have renounced them for a time, and to have given them over to their own hearts' lusts, *to work iniquity with greediness?* If such is their present career, what is likely to be their appointed end? How fearfully applicable to them seems that awful denunciation against an ancient, offending people: — "The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart!"

It is no part of the present design to enter into a detail of their political conduct; but I cannot omit to remark, that the very man in their long list of kings, who seemed best to have deserved their assumed appellation of *Most Christian*, was also most favourable to their acquisition of liberty*: his moderation and humanity facilitated their plans, and increased their power, which, with unparalleled ingratitude, they employed to degrade his person and character in the eyes of mankind, by the blackest and most detestable arts, and at length to terminate his calamities by a crime which has excited the grief and indignation of all Europe.

On the trial and murder of that most unfortunate king, and on the inhuman proceedings which accompanied them, I shall purposely avoid dwelling; for it is not the design of these

* Of this the French themselves were so well persuaded, that the title of *Restorateur de la Liberté Françoise*, was solemnly given to Louis the XVIth by the Constituent Assembly.

remarks to excite the passions. I will only say, that so monstrous has been the inversion of all order, law, humanity, justice, received opinion, good faith, and religion, that the conduct of his bloody executioners seems to have exhibited the most scrupulous conformity with the principles announced in the speeches we have been considering. In this one instance we must not call the French an inconsequent people. Savage brutality, rapine, treason, and murder, have been the noxious fruit gathered from these thorns,—the baneful produce of these thistles. An overturn of all morals has been the well-proportioned offspring of a subversion of all principle.

But, notwithstanding the consistency, in this instance, between cause and consequence; so new and surprising have been the turns in their extraordinary projects, that to foretell what their next enterprise would be from what their last has been, has long baffled all calculation, has long bid defiance to all conjecture. Analogy from history, the study of past events, and an investigation of present principles and passions; judgment, memory, comparison, combination, and deduction, afford human sagacity but very slender assistance in its endeavours to develope their future plans. We have not even the data of consistent wickedness on which to build rational conclusions. Their crimes, though visibly connected by uniform depravity, are yet so surprisingly diversified by interfering absurdities,

as to furnish no ground on which reasonable argument can be founded. Nay, such is their incredible eccentricity, that it is hardly extravagant to affirm, that improbability is become rather an additional reason for expecting any given event to take place.

But let us, in this yet happy country, learn at least one great and important truth, from the errors of this distracted people. Their conduct has awfully illustrated a position, which is not the less sound for having been often controverted, that no degree of wit and learning, no progress in commerce, no advances in the knowledge of nature, or in the embellishments of art, can ever thoroughly tame that savage, the *natural human heart*, without RELIGION. The arts of social life may give sweetness to manners, and grace to language, and induce, in some degree, a respect for justice, truth, and humanity; but attainments derived from such inferior causes are no more than the semblance and the shadow of the qualities derived from pure Christianity. Varnish is an extraneous ornament, but true polish is a proof of the solidity of the body on whose surface it is produced. It depends greatly on the nature of the substance, it is not superinduced by accidental causes, but in a good measure proceeds from internal soundness.

The poets of that classic country, whose style, sentiments, manners, and religion the French so affectedly labour to imitate, have left keen and

biting satires on the Roman vices. Against the late proceedings in France, no satirist need employ his pen; that of the historian will be quite sufficient to reprobate them: truth will be the severest satire; fact will put fable out of countenance; and the crimes which are usually held up to our abhorrence, and are rejected for their exaggeration in works of invention, will be regarded as flat and feeble by those who shall peruse the records of the tenth of August, of the second and third of September, and of the twenty-first of January.

If the same astonishing degeneracy in taste, principle, and practice, should ever come to flourish among *us*, Britain may still live to exult in the desolation of her cities, and in the destruction of her finest monuments of art; she may triumph in the peopling of the fortresses of her rocks and her forests; may exult in being once more restored to that glorious state of *liberty and equality*, when all subsisted by rapine and the chase; when all, O enviable privilege! were equally savage, equally indigent, and equally naked; her sons may extol it as the restoration of reason, the triumph of nature, and the consummation of liberty, that they are again brought to feed on acorns, instead of bread! Groves of consecrated mistletoe may happily succeed to useless corn-fields; and Thor and Woden may hope once more to be invested with all their bloody honours.

Let not any serious reader among us feel indignation, as if pains were ungenerously taken to involve their religious with their political opinions. Far be it from me to wound, unnecessarily, the feelings of people, many of whom are truly estimable; but it is much to be suspected, that certain opinions in politics have a tendency to lead to certain opinions in religion. Where so much is at stake, they will do well to keep their consciences tender, in order to which they should try to keep their discernment acute. They will do well to observe, that the same restless spirit of innovation is busily operating under various, though seemingly unconnected, forms; to observe, that the same impatience of restraint, the same contempt of order, peace, and subordination, which makes men bad citizens, makes them bad Christians; and that to this secret, but almost infallible, connection between religious and political sentiment, does France owe her present unparalleled anarchy and impiety.

There are doubtless in that unhappy country multitudes of virtuous and reasonable men, who rather silently acquiesce in the authority of their present turbulent government, than embrace its principles or promote its projects from the sober conviction of their own judgment. These, together with those conscientious exiles whom this nation so honourably protects, may yet live to rejoice in the restoration of true liberty and

solid peace to their native country, when light and order shall spring from the present darkness and confusion, and the reign of chaos shall be no more.

May I be permitted a short digression on the subject of the conduct of Great Britain to these exiles? It shall only be to remark, that all the boasted conquests of our Edwards and our Henries over the French nation do not confer such substantial glory on our own country, as she derives from having received, protected, and supported, among innumerable multitudes of other sufferers, at a time and under circumstances so peculiarly disadvantageous to herself, *seven thousand priests*, of a nation habitually her enemy, and of a religion intolerant and hostile to her own. This is the solid triumph of true Christianity; and it is worth remarking, that the deeds which poets and historians celebrate as rare and splendid actions, which they record as sublime instances of greatness of soul, in the heroes of the pagan world, are but the ordinary and habitual virtues which occur in the common course of action among genuine Christians; quietly performed without effort or exertion, and with no view to renown or reward; but resulting naturally and consequently from the religion to which they belong.

So predominating is the power of an example we have once admired, and set up as a standard of imitation, and so fascinating has been the

ascendency of the Convention over the minds of those whose approbation of French politics commenced in the earlier periods of the Revolution, that it extends to the most trivial circumstances. I cannot forbear to notice this in an instance which, though inconsiderable in itself, yet ceases to be so when we view it in the light of a prevailing symptom of the reigning disease.

While the fantastic phraseology of the new republic is such, as to be almost as disgusting to sound taste as their doctrines are to sound morals, it is curious to observe how deeply the addresses, which have been sent to it from the clubs * in this country, have been infected with it, as far at least as phrases and terms are objects of imitation. In the more leading points it is but justice to the French Convention to confess, that they are hitherto without rivals and without imitators; for who can aspire to emulate that compound of anarchy and atheism which in their debates is mixed up with the pedantry of a school-boy, the jargon of a cabal, and the vulgarity and ill-breeding of a mob? One instance of the prevailing cant may suffice, where a hundred might be adduced; and it is not the most exceptionable — to demolish every existing law and establishment; to destroy the fortunes and ruin the principles of every country into which they are carrying their destructive arms

* See the Collection of Addresses from England.

and their frantic doctrines; to untie or cut asunder every bond which holds society together; to impose their own arbitrary shackles where they succeed, and to demolish every thing where they fail. This desolating system, by a most unaccountable perversion of language, they are pleased to call by the endearing name of *fraternization*; and fraternization is one of the favourite terms which their admirers in this country have adopted. Little would a simple stranger, uninitiated in this new and surprising dialect, uninstructed by the political lexicographers of modern France, imagine that the peaceful terms of *fellow-citizen* and of *brother*, the winning offer of *freedom* and *happiness*, and the warm embrace of *fraternity*, were only watch-words by which they, in effect,

> —— "Cry havoc,
> And let slip the dogs of war."

In numberless other instances, the fashionable language of France at this day would be as unintelligible to the correct writers of the age of Louis the Fourteenth, as their fashionable notions of liberty would be irreconcilable with those of the true revolution patriots of England of his great contemporary and victorious rival, William the Third.

Such is, indeed, their puerile rage for novelty in the invention of new words, and the perversion of their taste in the use of old ones, that the cele-

brated Vossius, whom Christina of Sweden oddly complimented by saying, that he was so learned as not only to know whence all words came, but whither they were going, would, *were he admitted to the honours of a sitting*, be obliged to confess, that he was equally puzzled to tell the one, as to foretell the other.

If it shall please the Almighty in his anger to let loose this infatuated people, as a scourge for the iniquities of the human race; if they are delegated by Infinite Justice to act "as storm and tempest fulfilling his word;" if they are commissioned to perform the errand of the destroying lightning or the avenging thunder-bolt, let us try at least to extract personal benefit from national calamity; let every one of us, high and low, rich and poor, enter upon this serious and humbling enquiry, how much his own individual offences have contributed to that awful aggregate of public guilt, which has required such a visitation. Let us carefully examine in what proportion we have separately added to that common stock of abounding iniquity, the description of which formed the character of an ancient nation, and is so peculiarly applicable to our own,—*Pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness.* Let every one of us humbly enquire, in the self-suspecting language of the disciples to their Divine Master,—*Lord, is it I?* Let us learn to fear the fleets and armies of the foreign enemy much less than those iniquities at home

which this alarming dispensation may be intended to chastise.

The war which the French have declared against us is of a kind altogether unexampled in every respect; insomuch, that human wisdom is baffled when it would pretend to conjecture what may be the event. But this at least we may safely say, that it is not so much the force of French bayonets, as the contamination of French principles, that ought to excite our apprehensions. We trust that, through the blessing of GOD, we shall be defended from their open hostilities, by the temperate wisdom of our rulers, and the bravery of our fleets and armies; but the domestic danger arising from licentious and irreligious principles among ourselves can only be guarded against by the personal care and vigilance of every one of us who values religion and the good order of society in this world, and an eternity of happiness in the next.

GOD grant that those who go forth to fight our battles, instead of being intimidated by the number of their enemies, may bear in mind, that "there is no restraint with GOD to save by many or by few." And let the meanest among us who remains at home remember, also, that even he may contribute to the internal safety of his country, by the integrity of his private life, and to the success of her defenders, by following them with his fervent prayers. And in what

war can the sincere Christian ever have stronger inducements and more reasonable encouragement to pray for the success of his country than in this? Without entering far into any political principles, the discussion of which would be in a great measure foreign to the design of this little tract, it may be remarked, that the unchristian principle of *revenge* is not our motive to this war; *conquest* is not our object; nor have we had recourse to hostility, in order to effect a change in the internal government of France.* The present war is undoubtedly undertaken entirely on defensive principles. It is in defence of our king, our constitution, our religion, our laws, and, consequently, our *liberty*, in the sound, sober, and rational sense of that term. It is to defend ourselves from the savage violence of a crusade, made against all religion, as well as all government. If ever, therefore, a war was undertaken on the ground of self-defence and necessity, — if ever men might be *literally* said to fight *pro* ARIS *et* FOCIS, this seems to be the occasion.

The ambition of conquerors has been the source of great and extensive evils; religious fanaticism, of still greater. But little as I am disposed to become the apologist of either the one principle or the other, there is no extravagance in asserting, that they have seemed inca-

* See the Report of Mr. Pitt's Speech in the House of Commons on Feb. 12. 1793, published by Woodfall.

pable of producing, even in ages, that extent of mischief, that variety of ruin, that comprehensive desolation, which *philosophy, falsely so called*, has produced in three years.

Christians! it is not a small thing,— *it is your life*. The pestilence of irreligion, which you detest, will insinuate itself imperceptibly with those manners, phrases, and principles which you admire and adopt. It is the humble wisdom of a Christian to shrink from the most distant approaches to sin, to abstain from the very appearance of evil. If we would fly from the deadly contagion of atheism, let us fly from those seemingly remote, but not very indirect, paths which lead to it. Let France choose this day whom she will serve; *but, as for us and our houses, we will serve the Lord.*

And, O gracious and long-suffering GOD! before that awful period arrives, which shall exhibit the dreadful effects of such an education as the French nation are instituting; before a race of men can be trained up, not only without the knowledge of THEE, but in the contempt of THY most holy laws, do THOU, in great mercy, change the heart of this people as the heart of one man. Give them not finally over to their own corrupt imaginations, to their own hearts' lusts. But after having made them a fearful example to all the nations of the earth, of what a people *can* do, who have cast off the fear of THEE, do THOU graciously bring them back to a sense of that

law which they have violated, and to a participation of that mercy which they have abused; so that they may happily find, while the discovery can be attended with hope and consolation, that *doubtless there is a reward for the righteous; verily, there is a* GOD *who judgeth the earth.*

THE

SPIRIT OF PRAYER,

SELECTED AND COMPILED BY THE AUTHOR,

FROM

VARIOUS PORTIONS EXCLUSIVELY ON THAT SUBJECT,

IN

HER OTHER WORKS.

"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle,"
"I will endeavour that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance."

2 PETER, ch. i.

PREFACE.

FROM a sick, and, in all human probability, a dying bed, the writer of these pages feels an earnest desire to be enabled, with the blessing of God, to execute a little plan which has at different times crossed her mind, but which she never found leisure to accomplish, till the present season of incapacity.

"The importunity of friends,"—that hackneyed apology for works of inferior merit, is not, in the present instance, the less true for being worn threadbare. By many partial friends she has frequently been desired to write a volume exclusively on prayer. With this request she has always declined complying; because, among other reasons, she was aware that she had previously exhausted — not the subject itself, which is indeed inexhaustible, — but the slender resources of her own mind.

In her, perhaps too numerous, printed works, written on different subjects, and at distant periods, there are very many volumes, in which not only some reference has been made, but

some distinct portions assigned to the all-important subject of Prayer.

It is now her latest and warmest wish to be permitted to collect and examine some of those portions which treat more directly of this great duty; to unite the scattered members into one compact body, and to bring each under its proper head, into one point of view. All she is herself able to do is to hear these extracts read by kind friends, and to adopt such passages as she may think proper for selection.

Perhaps the silence and solitude of her present nightly watchings may, through Divine grace, impress her own heart with a still deeper sense of the unspeakable importance and value of Prayer, and of the support and consolation which may be granted in answer to this exercise, when every other support and consolation must inevitably fail.

However small may be the use of this little volume to the reader, the writer at least is already reaping one benefit herself from what she has presumed to suggest to others, — the benefit of feeling, as she reviews these pages, how sadly she herself has fallen short in the duties she has so repeatedly recommended. In this re-examination she has sensibly felt how easy it is to be good upon paper, and how difficult in practice.

At the same time, she humbly trusts that her very failures may have enabled her to touch these

subjects more experimentally than she might have done, had her own deficiencies been less powerfully recollected, and less acutely felt.

The Author ventures to hope that her valued friends, to whom this little volume is more especially dedicated, will consider it as the last bequest of one, who, about to quit this transitory scene, and feeling the deepest interest in their spiritual prosperity, as also for that of all her fellow-Christians, is desirous, by this her final act, to testify at least her affectionate anxiety for their eternal happiness.

The present weak state of the Author must apologise for inaccuracies and repetitions.

Barley-Wood.

THE

SPIRIT OF PRAYER.

CHAP. I.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER FOUNDED ON THE CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE.

THE subject of man's apostasy is so nearly connected with the subject of Prayer, being indeed that which constitutes the necessity of this duty, that some mention of the one ought to precede any discussion of the other. Let, then, the conviction that we have fallen from our original state, and that this lapse presents the most powerful incentive to prayer, furnish an apology for making a few preliminary remarks on this great article of our faith.

The doctrine is not the less a fundamental doctrine, because it has been abused to the worst purposes; some have erroneously considered it as leaving us without hope, and others as lending an excuse to unresisted sin. It is a doctrine which meets us in one unbroken series

throughout the whole sacred volume; we find it from the third of Genesis, which records the event of man's apostasy, carried on through the history of its fatal consequences in all the subsequent instances of sin, individual and national, and running in one continued stream from the first sad tale of woe, to the close of the sacred canon in the Apocalyptic Vision.

And, to remove the groundless hope, that this quality of inherent corruption belonged only to the profligate and abandoned, the Divine Inspirer of the sacred writers took especial care that they should not confine themselves to relate the sins of these alone.

Why are the errors, the weaknesses, and even the crimes of the best men recorded with equal fidelity? Why are we told of the twice-repeated deceit of the father of the faithful? Why of the single instance of vanity in Hezekiah? Why of the too impetuous seal of Elijah? Why of the error of the almost perfect Moses? Why of the insincerity of Jacob? Why of the far darker crimes of the otherwise holy David? Why of the departure of the wisest of men from that piety displayed with sublimity unparalleled in the dedication of the temple? Why seems it to have been invariably studied, to record with more minute detail the vices and errors of these eminent men, than even those of the successive impious kings of Israel, and of Judah; while these last are generally dismissed with the

brief, but melancholy sentence, that they did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; followed only by too frequent an intimation that they made way for a successor worse than themselves? The answer is, that the truth of our universal lapse could only be proved by transmitting the record of those vices, from which even the holiest men were not exempt.

Had the Holy Scriptures kept back from man the faithful delineations of the illustrious characters to which we have referred, the truth of the doctrine in question, though occasionally felt, and, in spite of his resistance, forced upon him, would not have been believed; or, if believed, would not have been acknowledged.

Christianity hangs on a few plain truths; "that God is, and that he is the rewarder of all that seek him;" that man has apostatised from his original character, and by it has forfeited his original destination; that Christ came into this world and died upon the cross to expiate sin, and to save sinners; that after his ascension into heaven, he did not leave his work imperfect. He sent his Holy Spirit, who performed his first office by giving to the apostles miraculous powers. His offices did not cease there; he has, indeed, withdrawn his miraculous gifts, but he still continues his silent but powerful operations, and that in their due order; — first, that of convincing of sin, and of changing the heart of the sinner, before he assumes the gracious

character of the Comforter. What need, then, of heresies to perplex doctrines, or of philosophy to entangle, or of will-worshippers to multiply them?

We do not deny that there are, in Christianity, high and holy mysteries; but these "secret things," though they "belong to God," have their practical uses for us; they teach us humility, the prime Christian grace; they send us to prayer for the attainment of that grace, and they exercise faith, the parent attribute of all other graces.

This religion of facts, then, the poorest listeners in the aisles of our churches understand sufficiently, to be made by it wise unto salvation. They are saved by a practical belief of a few simple but inestimable truths.

By these same simple truths, martyrs and confessors, our persecuted saints, and our blessed reformers, were saved. By these few simple truths, Locke, and Boyle, and Newton, were saved; not because they saw their religion through the glass of their philosophy, but because theirs was not "a philosophy, falsely so called;" nor their science, "a science of opposition;" but a science and a philosophy which were made subservient to Christianity, and because their deep humility sanctified their astonishing powers of mind. These wonderful men, at whose feet the learned world is still satisfied to sit, sat themselves at the feet of Jesus. Had

there been any other way but the cross by which sinners could be saved, they, perhaps, of all men, were best qualified to have found it.

To return, then, to the particular doctrine under consideration: — Let us believe man is corrupt, because the Bible tells us he is so. Let us believe that all were so by nature, even the best, since we learn it from Divine authority. Let us, from the same authority, trace the disorder to its source from a fallen parent, its seat in a corrupt heart, its extent through the whole man, its universality over the entire race.

All are willing to allow that we are subject to frailties, to imperfections, to infirmities: facts compel us to confess a propensity to crimes; but worldly men confine the commission of them to the vulgar. But to rest here would lead us to a very false estimate of the doctrine in question, contrary to the decisive language of Scripture; it would establish corruption to be an accident, and not a root. It would, by a division of offenders into two classes, deny that all offences are derived from one common principle.

If, then, men would examine their own bosoms as closely as they censure the faults of others loudly, we should all find there the incipient stirrings of many a sin, which, when brought into action by circumstances, produce consequences the most appalling. Let us, then, bless God, not that we are better than other

men, but that we are placed by Providence out of the reach of being goaded by that temptation, stimulated by that poverty, which, had they been our lot, might have led to the same termination.

Let, then, the fear of God, the knowledge of His Word, and the knowledge of ourselves, teach us that there is not, by nature, so wide a difference between ourselves and others as we fondly imagine; that there is not, by nature, a great gulf fixed, that they who are on this side might not have passed over to the other. Let us not look to any superior virtue, to any native strength of our own; but let us look with a lively gratitude to that mercy of God which has preserved us from the temptations to which they have yielded. But, above all, let us look to that preventing and restraining grace which is withheld from none who ask it: without this all-powerful grace, Latimer might have led Bonner to the stake; with it, Bonner might have ascended the scaffold, a martyr to true religion. Without this grace, Luther might have fattened on the sale of indulgences; and with it, Leo the Tenth might have accomplished the blessed work of Reformation.

CHAP. II.

THE DUTY OF PRAYER INFERRED FROM THE HELPLESSNESS OF MAN.

MAN is not only a sinful, he is also a helpless, and therefore a dependent, being. This offers new and powerful motives for the necessity of prayer, the necessity of looking continually to a higher power, to a better strength than our own. If that Power sustain us not, we fall; if He direct us not, we wander. His guidance is not only perfect freedom, but perfect safety. Our greatest danger begins from the moment we imagine we are able to go alone.

The self-sufficiency of man arising from his imaginary dignity is a favourite doctrine with the nominal Christian. He feeds his pride with this pernicious aliment. And, as we hear much, so we hear falsely, of the dignity of human nature. Prayer, founded on the true principles of Scripture, alone teaches us wherein our true dignity consists. The dignity of a fallen creature is a perfect anomaly. True dignity, contrary to the common opinion, that it is an inherent excellence, is actually a sense of the want of it: it consists not in our valuing ourselves, but in a continual feeling of our depend-

ence upon God, and an unceasing aim at conformity to his image.

Nothing but a humbling sense of the sinfulness of our nature, of our practised offences, of our utter helplessness, and constant dependence, can bring us to fervent and persevering prayer. How did the faith of the saints of old flourish under a darker dispensation, through all the clouds and ignorance which obscured their views of God! "They looked unto Him, and were enlightened!" How do their slender means and high attainments reproach us!

David found that the strength and spirit of nature which had enabled him to resist the lion and the bear, did not enable him to resist his outward temptations, nor to conquer his inward corruptions. He therefore prayed, not only for deliverance "from blood-guiltiness," for a grievously remembered sin; he prayed for the *principle* of piety, for the *fountain* of holiness, for "the creation of a clean heart," for "the renewing of a right spirit," for "truth in the inward parts," that the "comfort of God's help might be granted him." This uniform avowal of the secret workings of sin, this uniform dependence on the mercy of God to pardon, and the grace of God to assist, render his precatory addresses, though they are those of a sovereign and a warrior, so universally applicable to the case of every private Christian.

One of our best poets, — himself an unsuc-

cessful courtier, — from a personal experience of the mortifying feelings of abject solicitation, has said, that if there were the man in the world whom he was at liberty to hate, he would wish him no greater punishment than *attendance and dependence*. But he applies the heavy penalty of this wish to the dependants on *mortal* greatness.

Now, attendance and dependence are the very essence both of the safety and happiness of a Christian. Dependence on God is his only true liberty, as attendance on Him is his only true consolation. The suitor for human favour is liable to continual disappointment; — if he knock at the door of his patron, there is probably a general order not to admit him. In the higher case, there is a special promise, that "to him that knocks it shall be opened." The human patron hates importunity; the heavenly Patron invites it. The one receives his suitor according to his humour, or refuses his admission from the caprice of the moment; with the other, "there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning." "Come unto me," is His uniform invitation. The Almighty Donor never puts off His humble petitioner to a more convenient season. *His* Court of Requests is always open. He receives the petition as soon as it is offered; He grants it as soon as it is made; and though He will not dispense with a continuance of the application, yet to every fresh application He

promises fresh support. He will still be solicited, but it is in order that He may still bestow. Repeated gifts do not exhaust His bounty, nor lessen His power of fulfilment. Repeated solicitation, so far from wearying His patience, is an additional call for His favour.

Nor is the lateness of the petition any bar to its acceptance: He likes it should be early, but He rejects it not though it be late.

And as past mercies on God's part, so, to the praise of His grace be it said, that past offences on our own part are no hinderance to the application of hearty repentance, or the answer of fervent prayer.

The man in power has many claimants on his favour, and comparatively few boons to bestow. The God of Power has all things in His gift, and only blames the solicitor for coming so seldom, or coming so late, or staying so little a while. He only wishes that His best gifts were more earnestly sought.

When we solicit an earthly benefactor, it is often upon the strength of some pretence to his favour, — the hope of some reward for past services: even if we can produce little claim, we insinuate something like merit. But when we approach our heavenly Benefactor, so far from having any thing like claim, any thing like merit, to produce, our only true and our only acceptable plea, is our utter want both of claim and merit, — is the utter destitution of all that

can recommend us; yet we presume to ask favour, when we deserve nothing but rejection; we are encouraged to ask for eternal happiness, when we deserve only eternal punishment. Though we have nothing to produce but disloyalty, we ask for the privileges of subjects; though nothing but disobedience to offer, we plead the privileges of children, — we implore the tenderness of a father.

The petitioner to human power, who may formerly have offended his benefactor, contrives to soften his displeasure, by representing that the offence was a small one. The devout petitioner to God uses no such subterfuge. In the boldness of faith, and the humility of repentance, he cries, "Pardon my iniquity, for it is *great*."

He who does not believe this fundamental truth, "the helplessness of man," on which the other doctrines of the Bible are built, — even he who does nominally profess to assent to it as a doctrine of Scripture; yet, if he does not experimentally acknowledge it; if he does not feel it in the convictions of his own awakened conscience, in his discovery of the evil wrokings of his own heart, and the wrong propensities of his own nature, all bearing their testimony to its truth, — such a one will not pray earnestly for its cure, — will not pray with that feeling of his own helplessness, with that sense of dependence on Divine assistance, which alone makes prayer efficacious.

Of this corruption he can never attain an adequate conception, till his progress in religion has opened his eyes on what is the natural state of man. Till this was the case, he himself was as far from desiring the change as he was from believing it necessary. He does not even suspect its existence, till he is in some measure delivered from its dominion.

Nothing will make us truly humble, nothing will make us constantly vigilant, nothing will entirely lead us to have recourse to prayer so fervently or so frequently, as this ever-abiding sense of our corrupt and helpless nature, as our not being able to ascribe any disposition in ourselves to any thing that is good, or any power to avoid, by our own strength, any thing that is evil.

CHAP. III.

PRAYER:— ITS DEFINITION.

PRAYER is the application of want to Him who alone can relieve it, the voice of sin to Him who alone can pardon it. It is the urgency of poverty, the prostration of humility, the fervency of penitence, the confidence of trust. It is not eloquence, but earnestness; not figures of speech, but compunction of soul. It is the "Lord, save us, we perish," of drowning Peter; the cry of faith to the ear of mercy.

Adoration is the noblest employment of created beings; confession, the natural language of guilty creatures; praise, the spontaneous expression of pardoned sinners. Prayer is desire; the abasement of contrition; the energy of gratitude. It is not a mere conception of the mind, nor an effort of the intellect, nor an act of the memory; but an elevation of the soul towards its Maker. It is the devout breathing of a creature struck with a sense of its own misery, and of the infinite holiness of Him whom it is addressing, experimentally convinced of its own emptiness, and of the abundant fulness of God,

of his readiness to hear, of his power to help, of his willingness to save. It is not an emotion produced in the senses, nor an effect wrought by the imagination; but a determination of the will, an effusion of the heart.

Prayer is the guide to self-knowledge, by prompting us to look after our sins, in order to pray against them; it is a motive to vigilance, by teaching us to guard agsinst those sins which, through self-examination, we have been enabled to detect.

Prayer is an act both of the understanding and of the heart. The understanding must apply itself to the knowledge of the Divine perfections, or the heart will not be led to the adoration of them. It would not be a *reasonable* service, if the mind was excluded. It must be rational worship, or the human worshipper would not bring to the service the distinguishing faculty of his nature, which is reason. It must be spiritual worship, or it would want the distinctive quality to make it acceptable to Him who is a Spirit, and who has declared that he will be worshipped "in spirit and in truth."

Prayer is right in itself as the most powerful means of resisting sin and advancing in holiness. It is above all right, as every thing is which has the authority of Scripture, the command of God, and the example of Christ.

There is a perfect consistency in all the ordinations of God; a perfect congruity in the

whole scheme of his dispensations. If man were not a corrupt creature, such prayer as the Gospel enjoins would not have been necessary. Had not prayer been an important means for curing those corruptions, a God of perfect wisdom would not have ordered it. He would not have prohibited every thing which tends to inflame and promote them, had they not existed; nor would he have commanded every thing that has a tendency to diminish and remove them, had not their existence been fatal. Prayer, therefore, is an indispensable part of his economy and of our obedience.

It is a hackneyed objection to the use of Prayer, that it is offending the omniscience of God to suppose he requires information of our wants. But no objection can be more futile. We do not pray to inform God of our wants, but to express our sense of the wants which he already knows. As he has not so much made his promises to our necessities as to our requests, it is reasonable that our requests should be made before we can hope that our necessities will be relieved. God does not promise to those who want that they shall "have," but to those who "ask;" nor to those who need, that they shall "find," but to those who "seek." So far, therefore, from his previous knowledge of our wants being a ground of objection to Prayer, it is, in fact, the true ground for our application. Were he not Knowledge itself, our information

would be of as little use, as our application would be, were he not Goodness itself.

We cannot attain to a just notion of Prayer while we remain ignorant of our own nature, of the nature of God as revealed in Scripture, of our relation to him, and dependence on him. If, therefore, we do not live in the daily study of the Holy Scriptures, we shall want the highest motives to his duty, and the best helps for performing it; if we do, the cogency of these motives, and the inestimable value of these helps, will render argument unnecessary, and exhortation superfluous.

One cause, therefore, of the dulness of many Christians in Prayer, is their slight acquaintance with the sacred volume. They hear it periodically, they read it occasionally, they are contented to know it historically, to consider it superficially; but they do not endeavour to get their minds imbued with its spirit. If they store their memory with its facts, they do not impress their hearts with its truths. They do not regard it as the nutriment on which their spiritual life and growth depend. They do not pray over it; they do not consider all its doctrines as of practical application; they do not cultivate that spiritual discernment, which alone can enable them judiciously to appropriate its promises, and apply its denunciations to their own actual case. They do not use it as an unerring line to ascertain their own rectitude, or detect their own obliquities.

In our retirements we too often fritter away our precious moments — moments rescued from the world — in trivial, sometimes, it is to be feared, in corrupt thoughts. But if we must give the reins to our imagination, let us send this excursive faculty to range among great and noble objects. Let it stretch forward, under the sanction of faith and the anticipation of prophecy, to the accomplishment of those glorious promises and tremendous threatenings which will soon be realised in the eternal world. These are topics which, under the safe and sober guidance of Scripture, will fix its largest speculations, and sustain its loftiest flights. The same Scripture, while it expands and elevates the mind, will keep it subject to the dominion of truth; while at the same time it will teach it, that its boldest excursions must fall infinitely short of the astonishing realities of a future state.

Though we cannot pray with a too deep sense of sin, we may make our sins too exclusively the object of our prayers. While we keep, with a self-abasing eye, our own corruptions in view, let us look with equal intentness on that mercy which cleanseth from all sin. Let our prayers be all humiliation, but let them not be all complaint. When men indulge no other thought but that they are attainted rebels, the hopelessness of pardon hardens them into disloyalty. Let them look to the mercy of the King, as well as to the rebellion of the subject. If we con-

template his grace as displayed in the Gospel, then, though our humility will increase, our despair will vanish. Gratitude in this, as in human instances, will create affection. "We love him because he first loved us."

Let us, therefore, always keep our unworthiness in view, as a reason why we stand in need of the mercy of God in Christ; but never plead it as a reason why we should not draw nigh to him to implore that mercy. The best men are unworthy for their own sakes; the worst, on repentance, will be accepted for his sake, and through his merits.

In prayer, then, the perfections of God, and, especially, his mercies in our redemption, should occupy our thoughts, as much as our sins: our obligations to him as much as our departures from him. We should keep up in our hearts a constant sense of our own weakness, not with a design to discourage the mind and depress the spirits, but with a view to drive us out of ourselves, in search of the Divine assistance. We should contemplate our infirmity, in order to draw us to look for his strength, and to seek that power from God which we vainly look for in ourselves: we do not tell a sick friend of his danger in order to grieve or terrify him, but to induce him to apply to his physician, and to have recourse to his remedy.

Among the charges which have been brought against serious piety, one is, that it teaches men

to despair. The charge is just, in one sense, as to the fact; but false in the sense intended. It teaches us to despair, indeed, of ourselves, while it inculcates that faith in a Redeemer, which is the true antidote to despair. Faith quickens the doubting, while it humbles the presumptuous spirit. The lowly Christian takes comfort in the blessed promise, that God will never forsake them that are his. The presumptuous man is equally right in the doctrine; but wrong in applying it. He takes that comfort to himself which was meant for another class of characters. The mal-appropriation of Scripture promises and threatenings is the cause of much error and delusion.

Some devout enthusiasts have fallen into error by an unnatural and impracticable disinterestedness, asserting that God is to be loved exclusively for himself, with an absolute renunciation of any view of advantage to ourselves: yet that prayer cannot be mercenary, which involves God's glory with our own happiness, and makes his will the law of our requests. Though we are to desire the glory of God supremely; though this ought to be our grand actuating principle; yet he has graciously permitted, commanded, invited us, to attach our own happiness to this primary object. The Bible exhibits not only a beautiful, but an inseparable combination of both, which delivers us from the danger of preposterously imagining, that an absolute renun-

ciation of all benefit to ourselves is necessary for the promotion of God's glory on the one hand; and on the other, from seeking any happiness independent of him, and underived from him. In enjoining us to love him supremely, he has connected an unspeakable blessing with a paramount duty, the highest privilege with the most positive command.

What a triumph for the humble Christian to be assured, that "the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth," is the God of his life, to know that he is even invited to take the Lord for his God. To close with God's offers, to accept his invitations, to receive God as our portion, must surely be more pleasing to our heavenly Father, than separating our happiness from his glory. To disconnect our interests from his goodness, is at once to detract from his perfections, and to obscure the brightness of our own hopes. The declarations of the inspired writers are confirmed by the authority of the heavenly hosts. They proclaim that the glory of God and the happiness of his creatures, so far from interfering, are connected with each other. We know but of one anthem composed and sung by angels, and this most harmoniously combines "the glory of God in the highest, with peace on earth, and good will to men."

"The beauty of Scripture," says the great Saxon reformer, "consists in pronouns." This

God is *our* God; — God, even our *own* God shall bless us. How delightful the appropriation! To glorify him as being in himself consummate excellence, and to love him from the feeling that his excellence is directed to our felicity! Here modesty would be ingratitude, disinterestedness, rebellion. It would be severing ourselves from him, in whom we live, and move, and are; it would be dissolving the astonishing connection which he had condescended to establish between himself and his rational creatures.

The Scripture saints make this union the chief ground of their grateful exultation:—"*My* strength," "*my* rock," "*my* fortress," "*my* deliverer!" Again, "let the God of *my* salvation be exalted!" Now take away the pronoun, and substitute the article *the*, how comparatively cold is the impression! The consummation of the joy arises from the peculiarity, the intimacy, the endearment of the relation.

Nor to the liberal Christian is the grateful joy diminished, when he blesses his God as "the God of all them that trust in him." All general blessings, will he say, all providential mercies, are mine individually, are mine as completely as if no other shared in the enjoyment — life, light, the earth, and heavens, the sun and stars, whatsoever sustains the body, and recreates the spirits! My obligation is as great as if the mercy had been made purely for me; as great? nay, it is

greater; — it is augmented by a sense of the millions who participate in the blessing. The same enlargement of personal obligation holds good, nay, rises higher, in the mercies of Redemption. The Lord is *my* Saviour, as completely as if he had redeemed only me. That he has redeemed "a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," is diffusion without abatement; it is general participation without individual diminution. Each has all.

In adoring the providence of God, we are apt to be struck with what is new and out of course, while we too much overlook long, habitual, and uninterrupted mercies. But common mercies, if less striking, are more valuable, both because we have them always, and, for the reason above assigned, because others share them. The ordinary blessings of life are overlooked for the very reason that they ought to be most prized, because they are most uniformly bestowed. They are most essential to our support; and when once they are withdrawn, we begin to find that they are also most essential to our comfort. Nothing raises the price of a blessing like its removal, whereas it was its continuance which should have taught us its worth. We require novelties to awaken our gratitude, not considering that it is the duration of mercies which enhances their value. We want fresh excitements. We consider mercies long enjoyed as things of course,

as things to which we have a sort of claim by prescription; as if God had no right to withdraw what he has once bestowed; as if he were obliged to continue what he has once been pleased to confer.

But that the sun has shone unremittingly from the day that God created him, is not a less stupendous exertion of power, than that the hand which fixed him in the heavens, and marked out his progress through them, once said by his servant, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon." That he has gone on in his strength, driving his uninterrupted career, and "rejoicing as a giant to run his course," for six thousand years, is a more astonishing exhibition of Omnipotence than that he should have been once suspended by the hand which first set him in motion. That the ordinances of heaven, that the established laws of nature, should have been for one day interrupted to serve a particular occasion, is a less real wonder, and certainly a less substantial blessing, than that in such a multitude of ages they should have pursued their appointed course, for the comfort of the whole system.

As the affections of the Christian ought to be set on things above, so it is for them that his prayers will be chiefly addressed. God, in promising to "give those who delight in him the desire of their heart," could never mean temporal things, for these they might desire improperly as to the object, and inordinately as to

the degree. The promise relates principally to spiritual blessings. He not only gives us these mercies, but the very desire to obtain them is also his gift. Here our prayer requires no qualifying, no conditioning, no limitation. We cannot err in our choice, for God himself is the object of it: we cannot exceed in the degree, unless it were possible to love him too well, or to please him too much.

God shows his munificence in encouraging us to ask most earnestly for the greatest things, by promising that the smaller "shall be added unto us." We therefore acknowledge his liberality most, when we request the highest favours. He manifests his infinite superiority to earthly fathers, by chiefly delighting to confer those spiritual gifts which *they* less solicitously desire for their children, than those worldly advantages on which God sets so little value.

We should endeavour to render our private devotions effectual remedies for our own particular sins. Prayer against sin, in general, is too indefinite to reach the individual case. We must bring it home to our own hearts, else we may be confessing another man's sins, and overlooking our own. If we have any predominant fault, we should pray more especially against that fault. If we pray for any virtue of which we particularly stand in need, we should dwell on our own deficiencies in that virtue, till our souls become deeply affected with our want of

it. Our prayers should be circumstantial, not, as was before observed, for the information of Infinite Wisdom, but for the stirring up of our own dull affections. And as the recapitulation of our wants tends to keep up a sense of our dependence, the enlarging on our especial mercies will tend to keep alive a sense of gratitude; while indiscriminate petitions, confessions, and thanksgivings, leave the mind to wander in indefinite devotion, and unaffecting generalities, without personality, and without appropriation. It must be obvious, that we except those grand universal points in which all have an equal interest, and which must always form the essence of family, and, especially, of public prayer.

As we ought to live in a spirit of obedience to his commands, so we should live in a frame of waiting for his blessing on our prayers, and in a spirit of gratitude when we have obtained it. This is that "preparation of the heart" which would always keep us in a posture for duty. If we desert the duty because an immediate blessing does not visibly attend it, it shows that we do not serve God out of conscience, but selfishness; that we grudge expending on him that service which brings us in no immediate interest. Though he grant not our petition, let us never be tempted to withdraw our application.

Our reluctant devotions may remind us of the

remark of a certain great political wit *, who apologised for his late attendance in parliament, by his being detained while a party of soldiers were *dragging a volunteer* to his duty. How many excuses do we find for not being in time! How many apologies for brevity! How many evasions for neglect! How unwilling, too often, are we to come into the Divine presence, how reluctant to remain in it! Those hours which are least valuable for business, which are least seasonable for pleasure, we commonly give to religion. Our energies, which were so readily exerted in the society we have just quitted, are sunk as we approach the Divine presence. Our hearts, which were all alacrity in some frivolous conversation, become cold and inanimate, as if it were the natural property of devotion to freeze the affections. Our animal spirits, which so readily performed their functions before, now slacken their vigour, and lose their vivacity. The sluggish body sympathises with the unwilling mind, and each promotes the deadness of the other; both are slow in listening to the call of duty; both are soon weary in performing it. How do our fancies rove back to the pleasures we have been enjoying! How apt are the diversified images of those pleasures to mix themselves with our better thoughts, to pull down our higher aspirations! As prayer requires all

* Mr. Sheridan.

the energies of the compound being of man, so we too often feel as if there were a confederacy of body, soul, and spirit, to disincline and disqualify us for it.

When the heart is once sincerely turned to religion, we need not, every time we pray, examine into every truth, and seek for conviction over and over again; but assume that those doctrines are true, the truth of which we have already proved. From a general and fixed impression of these principles will result a taste, a disposedness, a love, so intimate, that the convictions of the understanding will become the affections of the heart.

To be deeply impressed with a few fundamental truths, to digest them thoroughly, to meditate on them seriously, to pray over them fervently, to get them deeply rooted in the heart, will be more productive of faith and holiness, than to labour after variety, ingenuity, or elegance. The indulgence of imagination will rather distract than edify. Searching after ingenious thoughts will rather divert the attention from God to ourselves, than promote fixedness of thought, singleness of intention, and devotedness of spirit. Whatever is subtle and refined is in danger of being unscriptural. If we do not guard the mind, it will learn to wander in quest of novelties. It will learn to set more value on original thoughts than devout affections. It is the business of prayer to cast

down imaginations which gratify the natural activity of the mind, while they leave the heart unhumbled.

We should confine ourselves to the present business of the present moment: we should keep the mind in a state of perpetual dependence; we should entertain no long views. "*Now* is the accepted time." "*To-day* we must hear his voice." "Give us *this* day our daily bread." The manna will not keep till to-morrow: to-morrow will have its own wants, and must have its own petitions. To-morrow we must seek anew the bread of heaven.

We should, however, avoid coming to our devotions with unfurnished minds. We should be always laying in materials for prayer, by a diligent course of serious reading, by treasuring up in our minds the most important truths. If we rush into the Divine presence with a vacant, or ignorant, or unprepared mind, with a heart full of the world; as we shall feel no disposition or qualification for the work we are about to engage in, so we cannot expect that our petitions will be heard or granted. There must be some congruity between the heart and the object, some affinity between the state of our minds and the business in which they are employed, if we would expect success in the work.

We are often deceived both as to the principle and the effect of our prayers. When, from some external cause, the heart is glad, the

spirits light, the thoughts ready, the tongue voluble, a kind of spontaneous eloquence is the result; with this we are pleased, and this ready flow we are willing to impose on ourselves for piety.

On the other hand, when the mind is dejected, the animal spirits low, the thoughts confused; when apposite words do not readily present themselves, we are apt to accuse our hearts of want of fervour, to lament our weakness, and to mourn that, because we have had no pleasure in praying, our prayers have, therefore, not ascended to the throne of mercy. In both cases, we, perhaps, judge ourselves unfairly. These unready accents, these faltering praises, these ill-expressed petitions, may find more acceptance than the florid talk with which we were so well satisfied: the latter consisted, it may be, of shining thoughts, floating on the fancy, eloquent words dwelling only on the lips; the former might be the sighing of a contrite spirit, abased by the feeling of its own unworthiness, and awed by the perfections of a holy and heart-searching God. The heart is dissatisfied with its own dull and tasteless repetitions, which, with all their imperfections, Infinite Goodness may, perhaps, hear with favour.* We may not only

* Of these sort of repetitions our admirable Church Liturgy has been accused as a fault; but this defect, if it be one, happily accommodates itself to our infirmities. Where is the favoured being whose attention never wan-

be elated with the fluency but even with the fervency of our prayers. Vanity may grow out of the very act of renouncing it; and we may begin to feel proud at having humbled ourselves so eloquently.

There is, however, a strain and spirit of prayer equally distinct from that facility and copiousness for which we certainly are never the better in the sight of God, and from that constraint and dryness for which we may be never the worse. There is a simple, solid, pious strain of prayer, in which the supplicant is so filled and occupied with a sense of his own dependence, and of the importance of the things for which he asks, and so persuaded of the power and grace of God through Christ to give him those things, that while he is engaged in it, he does not merely imagine, but feels assured that God is nigh to him as a reconciled Father, so that every burden and every doubt are taken off from his mind. "He knows," as St. John expresses it, "that he has the petitions he desired of God," and feels the truth of that promise, "While they are yet speaking I will hear." This is the perfection of Prayer.

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ders, whose heart accompanies his lips in every sentence? Is there no absence of mind in the petitioner, no wandering of the thoughts, no inconstancy of the heart, which these repetitions are wisely calculated to correct, to rouse the dead attention, to bring back the strayed affections?

CHAP. IV.

ON THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

It is objected by a certain class, and on the specious ground of humility too, though we do not always find the objector himself quite as humble as his plea would be thought, that it is arrogant, in such insignificant beings as we are, to presume to lay our petty necessities before the Great and Glorious God, who cannot be expected to condescend to the multitude of trifling and even interfering requests which are brought before him by his creatures. These and such like objections arise from mean and unworthy thoughts of the Great Governor of the universe. It seems as if those who make them considered the Most High as "such a one as themselves;" a Being, who can perform a certain given quantity of business, but who would be overpowered with an additional quantity. Or, at best, is it not considering the Almighty in the light, not of an infinite God, but of a great man, of a minister, or a king, who, while he superintends public and national concerns, is obliged to neglect small and individual petitions, because his hands being full, he cannot spare that leisure and attention which suffice for every thing?

They do not consider him as that infinitely gracious Being, who, while he beholds at once all that is doing in heaven and in earth, is at the same time as attentive to the prayer of the poor destitute, as present to the sorrowful sighing of the prisoner, as if each of these forlorn creatures were individually the object of his undivided attention.

These critics, who are for sparing the Supreme Being the trouble of our prayers, and who, if I may so speak without profaneness, would relieve Omnipotence of part of his burden, by assigning to his care only such a portion as may be more easily managed, seem to have no adequate conception of his attributes.

They forget that infinite wisdom puts him as easily within reach of all knowledge, as infinite power does of all performance; that he is a Being in whose plans complexity makes no difficulty, variety no obstruction, and multiplicity no confusion; that to ubiquity distance does not exist; that to infinity space is annihilated; that past, present, and future, are discerned more accurately at one glance of His eye, to whom a thousand years are as one day, than a single moment of time or a single point of space can be by ours.

Another class continue to bring forward, as pertinaciously as if it had never been answered, the exhausted argument, that seeing God is immutable, no petitions of ours can ever change

Him: that events themselves being settled in a fixed and unalterable course, and bound in a fatal necessity, it is folly to think that we can disturb the established laws of the universe, or interrupt the course of Providence by our prayers, and that it is absurd to suppose these firm decrees can be reversed by any requests of ours.

Without entering into the wide and trackless field of fate and free will, we would only observe, that these objections apply equally to all human actions as well as to prayer. It may, therefore, with the same propriety be urged, that seeing God is immutable and his decrees unalterable, therefore our *actions* can produce no change in Him or in our own state. Weak as well as impious reasoning! It may be questioned, whether even the modern French and German philosophers might not be prevailed upon to acknowledge the existence of God, if they might make such a use of his attributes.

How much more wisdom as well as happiness results from an humble Christian spirit! Such a plain practical text as "Draw near unto God, and he will draw near unto you," carries more consolation, more true knowledge of his wants and their remedy to the heart of a penitent sinner, than all the tomes of casuistry, which have puzzled the world ever since the question was first set afloat by its original propounders.

And as the plain man only got up and walked, to prove there was such a thing as motion, in answer to the philosopher who, in an elaborate theory, denied it; so the plain Christian, when he is borne down with the assurance that there is no efficacy in prayer, requires no better argument to repel the assertion than the good he finds in prayer itself. A Christian knows, because he feels, that prayer is, though in a way to him inscrutable, the medium of connection between God and his rational creatures, the method appointed by Him to draw down his blessings upon us. The Christian knows that prayer is the appointed means of uniting two ideas, one of the highest magnificence, the other of the most profound lowliness, within the compass of imagination; namely, that it is the link of communication between "the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity," and that heart of the "contrite in which he delights to dwell." He knows that this inexplicable union between beings so unspeakably, so essentially different, can only be maintained by prayer; that this is the strong but secret chain which unites time with eternity, earth with heaven, man with God.

The plain Christian, as was before observed, cannot explain why it is so; but while he *feels* the efficacy, he is contented to let the learned *define* it; and he will no more postpone prayer till he can produce a chain of reasoning on the

manner in which he derives benefit from it, than he will postpone eating till he can give a scientific lecture on the nature of digestion: he is contented with knowing that his meat has nourished him; and he leaves it to the philosopher, who may choose to defer his meal till he has elaborated his treatise, to starve in the interim. The Christian *feels* better than he is able to explain, that the functions of his spiritual life can no more be carried on without habitual prayer, than those of his natural life without frequent bodily nourishment. He feels renovation and strength grow out of the use of the appointed means, as necessarily in the one case as in the other. He feels that the health of his soul can no more be sustained, and its powers kept in continual vigour by the *prayers* of a distant day, than his body by the *aliment* of a distant day.

But there is one motive to the duty in question, far more constraining to the true believer than all others that can be named; more imperative than any argument on its utility, than any convictions of its efficacy, even than any experience of its consolations. *Prayer is the command of God;* the plain, positive, repeated injunction of the Most High, who declares "He will be enquired of." This is enough to secure the obedience of the Christian, even though a promise were not, as it always is, attached to the command. But in this case, to

our unspeakable comfort, the promise is as clear as the precept: "*Ask*, and ye shall *receive*." This is encouragement enough for the plain Christian. As to the *manner* in which prayer is made to coincide with the general scheme of God's plan in the government of human affairs; how God has left himself at liberty to reconcile our prayer with his own predetermined will; the Christian does not very critically examine, his precise and immediate duty being to pray, and not to examine.

In the mean time, it is enough for the humble believer to be assured, that the Judge of all the earth is doing right: it is enough for him to be assured in that word of God "which cannot lie," of numberless actual instances of the efficacy of prayer in obtaining blessings and averting calamities both national and individual: it is enough for him to be convinced experimentally, by that internal evidence which is, perhaps, paramount to all other evidence, the comfort he himself has received from prayer, when all other comforts have failed; and, above all, to end with the same motive with which we began, the only motive indeed which *he* requires for the performance of any duty, — it is motive enough for him, — that *Thus saith the Lord.*

Others there are, who, perhaps, not controverting any of these premises, yet neglect to build practical consequences on the admission

of them; who neither denying the duty nor the efficacy of prayer, yet go on to live either in the irregular observance or the total neglect of it, as appetite, or pleasure, or business, or humour, may happen to predominate; and who, by living almost without prayer, may be said "to live almost without God in the world." To such we can only say, that they little know what they lose. The time is hastening on when they will look upon those blessings as invaluable, which now they think not worth asking for; when they will bitterly regret the absence of those means and opportunities which now they either neglect or despise. "Oh, that they were wise! that they understood this! that they would consider their latter end!"

There are, again, others, who, it is to be feared, having once lived in the habit of prayer, yet not having been well grounded in those principles of faith and repentance on which genuine prayer is built, have, by degrees, totally discontinued it. "They do not find," say they, "that their affairs prosper the better or are the worse; or, perhaps, they were unsuccessful in their affairs even before they dropt the practice, and so had no encouragement to go on." But they do not *know* that they had no encouragement; they do not *know* how much worse their affairs might have gone on, had they discontinued it sooner, or how their prayers helped to retard their ruin. Or they do not *know* that, perhaps, "they asked amiss,"

or that, if they had obtained what they asked, they might have been far more unhappy. For a true believer never "restrains prayer," because he is not certain that he obtains every individual request; for he is persuaded that God, in compassion to our ignorance, sometimes in great mercy withholds what we desire, and often disappoints his most favourite children by giving them not what they ask, but what he knows is really good for them. The froward child, as a pious prelate * observes, cries for the shining blade, which the tender parent withholds, knowing it would cut his fingers.

Thus to persevere when we have not the encouragement of visible success, is an evidence of tried faith. Of this holy perseverance Job was a noble instance. Defeat and disappointment rather stimulated than stopped *his* prayers. Though in a vehement strain of passionate eloquence he exclaims, "I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard; I cry aloud, but there is no judgment:" yet so persuaded was he, notwithstanding, of the duty of continuing this holy importunity, that he persisted against all human hope, till he attained to that exalted pitch of unshaken faith, by which he was enabled to break out into that sublime apostrophe, "Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him."

But may we not say that there is a con-

* Bishop Hall.

siderable class, who not only bring none of the objections which we have stated against the use of prayer; who are so far from rejecting, that they are exact and regular in the performance of it; who yet take it up on as low ground as is consistent with their ideas of their own safety; who, while they consider prayer as an indispensable form, believe nothing of that change of heart and of those holy tempers which it is intended to produce? Many, who yet adhere scrupulously to the letter, are so far from entering into the spirit of this duty, that they are strongly inclined to suspect those of hypocrisy or fanaticism who adopt the true scriptural views of prayer. Nay, as even the Bible may be so wrested as to be made to speak almost any language in support of almost any opinion, these persons lay hold on Scripture itself, to bear them out in their own slight views of this duty; and they profess to borrow from thence the ground of that censure which they cast on the more serious Christians. Among the many passages which have been made to convey a meaning foreign to their original designs, none have been seized upon with more avidity by such persons than the pointed censures of our Saviour on those "who for a *pretence* make long prayers; as well as on those who use vain repetitions, and think they shall be heard for much speaking." Now the things here intended to be reproved were the hypocrisy of the Pharisees

and the ignorance of the heathen, together with the error of all those who depended on the success of their prayers, while they imitated the deceit of the one or the folly of the other. But our Saviour never meant that those severe reprehensions should cool or abridge the devotion of pious Christians, to which they do not at all apply.

More or fewer words, however, so little constitute the true value of prayer, that there is no doubt but one of the most affecting specimens on record is the short petition of the publican, full fraught as it is with that spirit of contrition and self-abasement which is the very principle and soul of prayer. And this specimen, perhaps, is the best model for that sudden lifting up of the heart which we call ejaculation. But we doubt, in general, whether the few hasty words, to which these frugal petitioners would stint the scanty devotions of others and themselves, will be always found ample enough to satisfy the humble penitent, who, being a sinner, has much to confess: who, hoping he is a pardoned sinner, has much to acknowledge. Such a one, perhaps, cannot always pour out the fulness of his soul within the prescribed abridgments.

Even the sincerest Christian, when he wishes to find his heart warm, has often to lament its coldness. Though he feel that he has received much, and has, therefore, much to be thankful for, yet he is not able at once to bring his way-

ward spirit into such a posture as shall fit it for the solemn duty. Such a one has not merely his form to repeat, but he has his tempers to reduce to order, his affections to excite, and his peace to make. His thoughts may be realising the sarcasm of the prophet on the idol Baal, "they may be gone a journey," and must be recalled; his heart, perhaps, "sleepeth, and must be awaked." A devout supplicant, too, will labour to affect and warm his mind with a sense of the great and gracious attributes of God, in imitation of the holy men of old. Like Jehoshaphat, he will sometimes enumerate "the power and the might, and the mercies of the Most High," in order to stir up the sentiments of awe, and gratitude, and love, and humility in his own soul.* He will labour to imitate the example of his Saviour, whose heart dilated with the expression of the same holy affections.

"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth." A heart thus animated, thus warmed with Divine love, cannot always scrupulously limit itself to the mere *business* of prayer, if I may so speak. It cannot content itself with merely spreading out its own necessities, but expands in contemplating the perfections of Him to whom he is addressing them.

The humble supplicant, though he be no longer *governed* by a love of the world, yet

* 2 Chron. xx. 5, 6.

grieves to find that he cannot totally exclude it from his thoughts. Though he has, on the whole, a deep sense of his own wants, and of the abundant provision which is made for them in the Gospel; yet, when he most wishes to be rejoicing in those strong motives for love and gratitude, alas! even then he has to mourn his worldliness, his insensibility, his deadness. He has to deplore the littleness and vanity of the objects which are even then drawing away his heart from his Redeemer. The best Christian is but too liable, during the temptations of the day, to be ensnared by "the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," and is not always brought, without effort, to reflect that he is but dust and ashes. How can even good persons, who are just come, perhaps, from listening to the flattery of their fellow-worms, acknowledge before God, without any preparation of the heart, that they are miserable sinners? They require a little time to impress on their own souls the truth of that solemn confession of sin which they are making to him, without which, brevity and not length might constitute hypocrisy.

Even the sincerely pious have in prayer grievous wanderings to lament, from which others mistakingly suppose the advanced Christian to be exempt. Such wanderings, that, as an old divine has observed, it would exceedingly humble a good man, could he, after he had prayed, be made to see his prayers written

down, with exact interlineations of all the vain and impertinent thoughts which had thrust themselves in amongst them. So that such a one will, indeed, from a strong sense of these distractions, feel deep occasion, with the prophet, to ask forgiveness for "the iniquity of his *holy* things;" and would find cause enough for humiliation every night, had he to lament the sins of his prayers only.

We know that such a brief petition, as "Lord, help my unbelief," if the supplicant be in so happy a frame, and the prayer be darted up with such strong faith, that his very soul mounts with the petition, may suffice to draw down a blessing which may be withheld from the more prolix petitioner: yet, if by prayer we do not mean a mere form of words, whether it be long or short, but that secret communion between God and the soul which is the very breath and being of religion, then is the Scripture so far from suggesting that short measure of which it is accused, that it expressly says, "Pray without ceasing;"—"Pray evermore;"—"I will that men pray every where;"—"Continue instant in prayer."

If such "repetitions" as these objectors reprobate stir up desires as yet unawakened, or protract affections already excited, (for "*vain* repetitions" are such as awaken or express no new desire, and serve no religious purpose,) then are "repetitions" not to be condemned.

And that our Saviour did not give the warning against "long prayers and repetitions," in the sense these objectors allege, is evident from his own practice; for once we are told "he continued *all night* in prayer to God." And again, in a most awful crisis of his life, it is expressly said, "He prayed the *third* time, using *the same words.*"

All habits gain by exercise; of course the Christian graces gain force and vigour by being called out, and, as it were, mustered in prayer. Love, faith, and trust in the Divine promises, if they were not kept alive by this stated intercourse with God, would wither and die.

CHAP. V.

VAIN EXCUSES FOR THE NEGLECT OF PRAYER.

THERE are not a few, who offer apologies for the neglect of spiritual duties, by saying they believe them to be right, but that they are tempted to neglect the exercise of them by idleness or business, by company or pleasure. This may be true, but temptations are not compulsions. The great adversary of souls may fill the fancy with alluring images of enjoyment, so as to draw us away from any duty; but it is in our own choice, either to indulge, or, through grace, to repel them. He may act upon the passions through outward objects, which introduce them to the mind through the senses, but the grace of God enables all, who faithfully ask it, to withstand them.

If we were not at liberty to reject temptation, sin would be no sin. It is the offer of the grace of resistance not used which makes the offender to be without excuse. All the motives and the allurements to sin would be ineffectual, would we keep up in our minds what are its "wages," — death; death spiritual, death eternal!

Of all the excuses for the neglect of prayer, the man of business justifies his omission to

himself by the most plausible apologies. Many of this class, active for themselves, and useful to the world, are far from disputing either the propriety or the duty of prayer; they are willing, however, for the present, to turn over this duty to the clergy, to the idle, to women and children. They allow it to be an important thing, but not the most important. They acknowledge, if men have time to spare, they cannot spend it better; but *they* have no time. It is, indeed, a duty; but a duty not to be compared with that of the court, the bar, the public office, the counting-house, or the shop.

Now, in pleading for the importance of the one we should be the last to detract from that of the other. We only plead for their entire compatibility.

We pass over the instance of Daniel, a man of business and a statesman, and of many other public characters, recorded in Scripture, and confine ourselves to the example of Nehemiah. He was not only an officer in the court of the greatest king of the East, but it was his duty to be much in the royal presence. He was, on a particular occasion, under deep affliction; for Jerusalem was in ruins! On a certain day, his sadness was so great, as to be visible to the king, at whose table he was attending.

The monarch enquired the cause of his sorrow, and what request he had to make. He instantly "prayed to the God of heaven,"

doubtless to strengthen him, and then made his petition to the king, for no less a boon, than to allow him to rebuild the walls of the sacred city. His prayer preceded his petition. It was that prayer which gave him courage to present that petition, and which, probably, induced the sovereign to grant it. What a double encouragement is here given to the courtier, both to pray to God, and to speak truth to a king!

Though the plea of the man of business, for his own particular exemption, can by no means be granted, yet it is the sense he entertains of the value of his professional duties which deceives him. It leads him to believe, that there can be no evil in substituting business for devotion. He is conscious that he is industrious, and he knows that industry is a great moral quality. He is rightly persuaded that the man of pleasure has no such plea to produce. He, therefore, imposes on himself, with the belief that there *can* be no harm in substituting a moral for a religious exercise; for he has learned to think highly of morality, while he assigns to religion only an inferior degree in his scale of duties.

He usually goes to church once on the Sunday; but it does not at all infringe on his religious system to examine his accounts, to give a great dinner, or to begin a journey on that day.

Now it is a serious truth, that there is no

man to whom prayer is more imperatively a duty, or more obviously a necessity, than to the man of business; whether in the higher or the middle classes of society. There is no man who more stands in need of quieting his anxieties, regulating his tempers, cooling his spirits, by a devout application for the blessing of God; none to whom it is more necessary to implore the Divine protection for the duties, or preservation from the dangers of the scene in which he is about to engage; none to whom it is more important to solicit direction in the difficulties which the day may produce; none on whom it is more incumbent to solicit support against the temptations which may be about to assail him; none to whom the petition for an enlightened conscience, an upright intention, a sound probity, and an undeviating sincerity, is of more importance.

What is so likely as prayer to enable him to stand prepared to meet the accidental fluctuations in his affairs, to receive without inebriation a sudden flow of prosperous fortune, or to sustain any adverse circumstances with resignation?

Even persons in more retired situations, even those who have made considerable advances in religion, cannot but acknowledge, how much the ordinary and necessary cares of daily life, especially, how much any unexpected accession to them, are likely to cause absence and dis-

traction in their devotions: — how much, then, ought they, whose whole life is business, to be on their guard against these dangers, to double their vigilance against them, and to implore direction under them?

Were the Christian militant accustomed never to engage in the moral battle of daily life, without putting on this panoply, the shafts of temptation would strike with a feeble and erring blow; they would not so deeply pierce the guarded heart. And were fervent, humble, daily prayer, once conscientiously adopted, its effects would reach beyond the week-day engagements. It would gradually extend its benign influence to the postponing of settling accounts, to the festive dinner, and the not absolutely necessary journey, to one of those six days in which we are enjoined to labour. It would lead him to the habit of doing "no manner of work" on that day, in which the doing of it was prohibited by the great Lawgiver in his own person.

We have more than once alluded to the diversities of character, occasional events, difference in the state of mind, as well as of circumstances, which may not only render the prayer which is suitable to one man unsuitable to another, but unsuitable to the same man under every alteration of circumstances.

But among the numerous topics for prayer, there is one which, being of universal interest,

ought not to be omitted. For by whatever dissimilarity of character, capacity, profession, station, or temper, the condition of man, and, of course, the nature of prayer, is diversified, there is one grand point of union, one circumstance, one condition, in which they must all meet; one state of which every man is equally certain; one event which happeneth to all, — "It is appointed unto every man once to die." The rugged road of sorrow, the flowery path of pleasure, as well as

"The paths of glory, lead but to the grave."

In praying, therefore, against the fear of death, we do not pray against a contingent but a certain evil; we pray to be delivered from the overwhelming dread of that house which is appointed for all living; we are put in mind that all who are born must die!

"The end of all things is at hand." To what purpose does the apostle convert this awful proclamation? Does he use it to encourage gloomy tempers, to invite to unprofitable melancholy? No: he uses the solemn admonition to stir us up to moral goodness, — therefore "be sober:" — he does more, he uses it to excite us to religious vigilance, — and "*watch* unto prayer."

Prayer against the fear of death, by keeping up in us a constant remembrance of our mortality, will help to wean us from a too intimate

attachment to the things we are so soon to quit. By this habitual preparation to meet our Judge, we shall be brought to pray more earnestly for an interest in the great Intercessor; and to strive more effectually against every offence which may aggravate the awfulness of that meeting.

Fervent prayer, that Divine grace may prepare us for death, will, if cordially adopted, answer many great moral purposes. It will remind every individual of every class that "the time is short;" — that "there is no repentance in the grave."

Perhaps even the worldly and thoughtless man, under an occasional fit of dejection, or an accidental disappointment, may be brought to say, "When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God." — Oh, think upon Him, now, call upon Him, *now*, — now, when you are in prosperity; now, when your fortunes are flourishing; now, when your hill is so strong that you think it shall never be removed: think upon Him, call upon Him when the scene is the brightest, when the world courts, flatteries invite, and pleasures betray you; think on Him, while you are able to think at all, while you possess the capacity of thinking. The time may come, when "He may turn His face from you, and you will be troubled." Think of God, when the alluring images of pleasure and of profit would seduce you from Him. Prosperity is the season of peculiar peril. "It is the bright

day that brings forth the adder." Think of God when the tempting world says, "All this will I give thee." Trust not the insolvent world, it has cheated every creditor that ever trusted it. It will cheat you.

To the *man of opulence*, who heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them, Prayer will be a constant memento; it will remind him that he walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain; it will remind him of laying up treasures where thieves cannot enter, nor rust corrode.

The habit of praying against the fear of death would check the pride of youthful *beauty*, by reminding her how soon she must say to the worm, Thou art my father; and to corruption, Thou art my mother and my sister.

The *man of genius*, he who thought that of making many books there would be no end; who in his zeal to write, had neglected to pray; who had thought little of any immortality but that which was to be conferred by the applause of dying creatures like himself; who, in the vanity of possessing talents, had forgotten that he must one day account for the application of them: if happily he should be brought to see the evil of his own heart, to feel the wants of his own soul, how intense will be his repentance, how deep his remorse, that he had loved the praise of men more than the praise of God! How fervently will he pray that his mercies may

not aggravate the account of his sins; that his talents may not become the instrument of his punishment! How earnestly will he supplicate for pardon, how devoutly will he "give glory to God before his feet stumble on the dark mountains!"

The *man of business*, to whom we have already adverted, who thought his schemes so deeply laid, his speculations so prudently planned, that nothing could frustrate them; who calculated that the future was as much in his power as the present, forgot that death, that grand subverter of projects, might interpose his *veto*. This man, who could not find time to pray, must find time to die: he may at length find — happy if he ever find it — that he cannot meet his end with a peaceful heart, and a resigned spirit, without the preparation of prayer for support in that awful period, "when his purposes shall be broken off, and all his thoughts perish."

The *man of pleasure*, alas! what shall we say for *him?* He is sunk to the lowest step of degradation in the moral scale; he has not even human supports; he has robbed himself even of the ordinary consolations resorted to by ordinary men. He has no stay on which to lay hold, no twig at which to catch, no pretence by which to flatter himself into a false peace; no recollection of past usefulness; he has neither served his country nor benefited society, — what shall we say for him? If he pray not for him-

self, we must pray for him: — with God all things are possible.

The *statesman*, indefatigable in the public service, distinguished for integrity, but neglecting the offices of Christianity; whose lofty character power had not warped, nor cupidity debased, but whose religious principles, though they had never been renounced, had not been kept in exercise; — a spirit of rare disinterestedness; a moralist of unblenched honour, but who pleaded that duty had left him little time for devotion! should Divine grace incline him at last to seek God, should he begin to pray to be prepared for death and judgment, he will deeply regret with the contrite cardinal, not that he served his king faithfully, but that his highest services had not been devoted to their highest object. In this frame of mind that ambition which was satisfied with what earth could give, or kings reward, will appear no longer glorious in his eyes. True and just to his sovereign, devoted to his country, faithful to all but his Saviour and himself, he now laments that he had neglected to seek a better country, neglected to serve the King Eternal, the blessed and only Potentate; neglected to obtain an interest in a kingdom which shall not be moved. He feels that mere patriotism, grand as is its object, and important as is its end, will not afford support to a soul sinking at the approach of the inevitable hour, awed at the view of final judgment.

But these great and honourable persons are the very men to whom superior cares, and loftier duties, and higher responsibilities, render prayer even more necessary, were it possible, than to others. Nor does this duty trench upon other duties, for the compatibilities of prayer are universal. It is an exercise which has the property of incorporating itself with every other; not only not impeding, but advancing it. If secular thoughts, and vain imaginations, often break in on our devout employments, let us allow Religion to vindicate her rights, by uniting herself with our worldly occupations. There is no crevice so small at which devotion may not slip in; no other instance of so rich a blessing being annexed to so easy a condition; no other case in which there is any certainty, that to ask is to have. This the suitors to the great do not always find so easy from them, as the great themselves may find from God.

Not only the elevation on which they stand makes this fence necessary for their personal security, by enabling them to bear the height without giddiness, but the guidance of God's hand is so essential to the operations they conduct, that the public prosperity, no less than their own safety, is involved in the practice of habitual prayer. God will be more likely to bless the hand which steers, and the head which directs, when both are ruled by the heart which prays. Happily, we need not look out of our

own age or nation for instances of public men, who, while they govern the country, are themselves governed by a religious principle; who petition the Almighty for direction, and praise Him for success.

The *hero*, who, in the hot engagement, surrounded with the "pride, pomp, and circumstance of war," bravely defied death, forgot all that was personal, and only remembered, nobly remembered, his country and his immediate duty; animated with the glory that was to be acquired by his arm, and almost ready to exclaim with the Roman patriot —

—— "what pity,
That we can die but once to serve our country!"

Yet, this hero, if he had never made a conscience of prayer, may he not hereafter find, that the most successful instrumentality is a distinct thing in itself, and will be different in its results from personal piety? May he not find, that though he saved others, himself he cannot save?

If, however, in after-life, in the cool shade of honourable retirement, he be brought, through the grace of God, to habituate himself to earnest prayer, he will deeply regret that he ever entered the field of battle without imploring the favour of the God of battles; that he had ever returned alive from slaughtered squadrons, without adoring the Author of his providential pre-

servation. If his penitence be sincere, his prayer will be effectual. It will fortify him under the more depressing prospect of that death which is soon to be encountered in the solitude of his darkened chamber, without witnesses, without glory, without the cheering band, without the spirit-stirring drum, without the tumultuous acclamation; with no objects to distract his attention; no conflicting concerns to divide his thoughts; no human arm, either of others or his own, on which to depend. This timely reflection, this late, though never *too* late prayer, may still prepare him for a peaceful dying bed; may lead him to lean on a stronger arm than his own, or that of an army; may conduct him to a victory over his last enemy, and thus dispose him to meet death in a safer state than when he despised it in the field; may bring him to acknowledge, that while he continued to live without subjection to the Captain of his salvation, though he had fought bravely, he had not yet fought the good fight.

CHAP. VI.

CHARACTERS WHO REJECT PRAYER.

AMONG the many articles of erroneous calculation, to which so much of the sin and misery of life may be attributed, the neglect or misuse of prayer will not form the lightest. The prophet Jeremiah, in his impassioned address to the Almighty, makes no distinction between those who acknowledge no God, and those who live without prayer. "Pour out thy fury, O Lord, upon the heathen, and upon the families that call not upon thy name." *

Some duties are more incumbent on some persons, and some on others; depending on the difference of talents, wealth, leisure, learning, station, and opportunities; but the duty of prayer is of imperative obligation; it is universal, because it demands none of any of the above

* We have not thought it necessary to touch upon family or public worship, assuming that those who habitually observe private prayer will conscientiously attend to the more public exercises of devotion; and when it is recollected that the Divine Being, who performed a miracle to feed the multitude, that He might set an example of prayer in every possible form, previously blessed the simple but abundant meal, how shall a *dependent* creature dare omit a duty so sanctified!

requisites; it demands only a willing heart, a consciousness of sin, a sense of dependence, a feeling of helplessness. Those who voluntarily neglect it, shut themselves out from the presence of their Maker. "I know you not," must assuredly be the sentence of exclusion on those who thus "know not God." Nothing, it is true, can exclude them from His inspection, but they exclude themselves from His favour.

Many nearly renounce prayer, by affecting to make it so indefinite a thing, as not to require regular exercise. Just as many, also, unhallow the Sabbath, who pretend they do nothing on week-days, which they should fear to do on Sundays. The truth is, instead of sanctifying the week-days by raising them to the duties of Sunday, — which is, indeed, impracticable, let men talk as they please, — they desecrate the Sabbath to secular purposes, and so contrive to keep no Sunday at all.

Stated seasons for indispensable employments are absolutely necessary for so desultory, so versatile a creature as man. That which is turned over to any chance-time is seldom done at all; and those who despise the recurrence of appointed times and seasons are only less censurable than those who rest in them.

Other duties and engagements have their allotted seasons: why, then, should the most important duty in which an immortal being can be employed, by being left to accident, become

liable to occasional omission, liable to increasing neglect, liable to total oblivion?

All the other various works of God know their appointed times; — the seasons, the heavenly bodies, day and night, seed-time, and harvest; — all set an example of undeviating regularity. Why should man, the only thinking, be the only disorderly work of Almighty power?

But whilst we are asserting the necessity of seasons of prayer, let us not be suspected of attaching undue importance to them; for all these are but the frame-work, the scaffolding, the mere mechanical and subsidiary adjuncts; they are but the preparations for Christian worship; they remind us, they intimate to us, that an important work is to be done, but are no part of the work itself.

They, therefore, who most insist on the value of stated devotions, must never lose sight of that grand, and universal prime truth, that wherever we are, still we are in God's presence; whatever we have, is His gift; whatever we hope, is His promise; feelings which are commensurate with all times, all places, and limited to no particular scenes or seasons.

There is in some, in many it is to be feared, a readiness to acknowledge this general doctrine, which what is miscalled natural religion teaches; but who are far from including in their system the peculiarities, the duties, the devotions of

Christianity. These are decorous men of the world, who, assuming the character of philosophical liberality, value themselves on having shaken off the shackles of prejudice, superstition, and system. They acknowledge a Creator of the universe, but it is in a vague and general way. They worship a Being, "whose temple is all space;" that is, every where but in the human heart. They put Him as far as possible from themselves. Believing that He has no providential care of them, they feel no personal interest in Him. God and nature are with them synonymous terms. That the creation of the world was His work, they do not go the length of denying; but that its government is in His hands, is, with them, very problematical.

In any case, however, they are assured that a Being of such immensity requires not the littleness of superstitious forms, nor the petty limitations of stated seasons, and regular devotions; that He is infinitely above attending to our paltry concerns, though God himself anticipated this objection, when he condescended to declare, "He that offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me."

One says, *he* can adore the Author of nature in the contemplation of his works; that the mountains and the fields are *his* altar for worship. Another says, that his notion of religion is to deal honestly in his commerce with the world; both insist that they can serve God any

where, and every where. We know they can, and we hope they do; but our Saviour, who knew the whole make of man, his levity, instability, and unfixedness, and who was yet no friend to the formalist or the superstitious, not only commands, at the hour of prayer, our entering into the closet, but our shutting the door, —a tacit reproof, perhaps, of the indevotion of the Sadducean, as well as the publicity of the Pharisaic religion, but certainly an admonition of general obligation.

In treating of prayer, it would be a superfluous labour to address unbelievers with the same arguments or persuasions which we would humbly propose to such as aver, with whatever degree of conviction, their belief in Christianity. It would be folly to address them with motives drawn from a book which they do not believe, or do not read. With those who are ignorant of the first principles of religion, or those who reject them, we have no common ground on which to stand. St. Paul, with his usual discrimination, has left us an example in this as well as in all other cases. With the philosophical Athenians, he confined his reasonings to natural religion. To the Jewish king, Agrippa, "who believed the prophets," in telling the story of his own conversion, he most judiciously introduced the great doctrines of remission of sins, and justification by faith.

If the Pyrrhonist in question were to see a

genuine Christian character delineated in all its dimensions, marked with its fair lineaments, and enlivened by its quickening spirit, such, for instance, as is exemplified in the character of St. Paul, he would consider it as a mere picture of the imagination; and would no more believe its reality than he believes that of Xenophon's Prince, the Stoic's Wise Man, Quintilian's Perfect Orator, or any other Platonic or Utopian representation. Or could he be brought to believe its actual existence, he would set such a man far above the necessity of prayer; he would emancipate him from any such humbling practice; he would enthrone him in his own independent worth: for how should he ever suspect that such a man would ever pray at all, much less would be in prayer more abundant, in humiliation more profound, in self-renunciation more abased?

Is it not probable that some of those enquiring minds, who adorned the porch and the academy, as well as those more favoured men under the old dispensation, who saw the future through the dim and distant perspective of prophecy, would have rejoiced to see the things which you see, and have not believed?

How gratefully would many of these illustrious spirits have accepted advantages which you overlook! How joyfully would they have received from Him who cannot lie the assurance, that if they would seek of Him that truth

after which they "were feeling," they should find it! How gladly would that sublime and elegant spirit, whose favourite theme was pure spiritual love, have listened to the great apostle of love; to him who caught the flame, as he leaned on the bosom of his affectionate Master!

How would this same exalted genius, who taught the immortality of the soul to the bright, yet blind, Athenians, — he, whose penetrating mind rather guessed than knew what he taught, — whose keen eye caught some glimpses of a brighter state through the darkness which surrounded him, — how would he have gloried in that light and immortality which the Gospel revelation has brought to light! — but with what unspeakable rapture would he have learned, that He who revealed the life could *give* it, that He who promised immortality could *bestow* it! With what obedient transport would he have heard this touching apostrophe, at once a strong reproof and a tender invitation, — "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life!" — Ye philosophising cavillers, who live in the meridian splendour of this broad day, "how will *you* escape, if you neglect so great salvation?"

But if pride, the dominant intellectual sin, keeps the sceptic aloof from the humiliating duties of devotion, the habitual indulgence of the senses, in another class, proves an equal cause of alienating the heart from prayer.

The man absorbed by ease and enjoyment, and

sunk in the relaxing softnesses of a voluptuous life, has a natural distaste to every thing that stands in opposition to the delights of that life. It is the smoothness of his course which makes it so slippery. He is lost before he feels that he is sinking. For whether we plunge at once from a precipitous height, or slide down from it on an inclined plane, still, while there is a yawning gulf at the bottom, our destruction is equally inevitable.

The systematic but decorous sensualist is one whose life is a course of sober luxury, of measured indulgence. He contrives to reconcile an abandonment of sound principle with a kind of orderly practice. He enquires rather what is decent than what is right; what will secure the favourable opinion of the world, especially his own class, rather than what will please God. His object is to make the most of this world. Selfishness has established its throne in his heart. His study is to make every thing and every person subservient to his own convenience, or pleasure, or profit, yet without glaringly trespassing on the laws of propriety or custom. Self is the source and centre of all his actions; but though this governing principle is always on the watch for its gratification, yet, as part of that gratification depends on a certain degree of reputation, it frequently leads him to do right things, though without right motives; for the

main-spring sometimes sets the right in motion as well as the wrong.

He goes to church on all public occasions, but without devotion; gives alms without charity; subscribes to public institutions without being interested in their prosperity, except as they are frequently succeeded by a pleasant dinner and good company, and as the subscription-list of names he knows will be published. He lives on good terms with different, and even opposite, classes of men, without being attached to any; he does them favours without affection, knowing that he shall have occasion to solicit favours in return, — for he never does a small kindness without a view to asking a greater.

He deprecates excess in every thing, but always lives upon its confines.

Prayer enters not into his plan, — he has nothing to ask, for he has all in himself, — thanksgiving is still less his practice, for what he has he deserves.

He has read that "to enjoy is to obey," and he is always ready to give this cheerful proof of the most unlimited obedience. He respects the laws of the country, especially such as guard property and game, and eagerly punishes the violators of both. But as to the laws of God, he thinks they were made to guard the possessions of the rich, to punish the vicious poor, and to frighten those who have nothing to lose. Yet

he respects some of the commandments, and would placard on every post and pillar that which says, "Thou shalt not steal;" whilst he thinks that which says, "Thou shalt not covet," might be expunged from the Decalogue.

If you happen to speak of the helplessness of man, he thinks you are alluding to some paralytic; if of his dependence, to some hanger-on of a great man; if of his sinfulness, he adopts your opinion, for he reads the Newgate Calendar; but of sin, as an inherent principle, of the turpitude of sin, except as it disturbs society, he knows nothing; but religion as a principle of action, but prayer as a source of peace or a ground of hope, he neither knows nor desires to know. The stream of life glides smoothly on without it; why should he ruffle its placid flow? why should he break in on the course of enjoyment with self-imposed austerities? He believes himself to be respected by his fellow-men, and the favour of God is not in all his thoughts. His real character the great day of decision will discover. Till then he will have two characters.

"Soul, take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for thee," is, perhaps, the state of all others which most disqualifies and unfits for prayer. Not only the apostrophe excites the bodily appetite, but the SOUL is called upon to contemplate, to repose on, the soothing prospect,

the delights of that voluptuousness for which the "much goods are laid up."

But when the prosperous Fool says, "Soul, take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for thee," the prosperous *Christian* says, "Soul, tremble at thine ease; be on thy guard; thou hast, indeed, much goods laid up for thee, but it is in a future world. Lose not a large inheritance for a paltry possession; forfeit not an unalienable reversion for a life-interest, — a life, which this very night may be required of thee."

Thus we see what restrains prayer in these two classes of character. The sceptic does not pray, because he does not believe that God is a hearer of prayer. The voluptuary, because he believes that God is such a one as himself, and because he has already gotten all that he wants of Him. His gold, and the means of gratifying his sensuality, would not be augmented by the dry duties of devotion; and with an exercise which would increase neither, he can easily dispense.

CHAP. VII.

ERRORS IN PRAYER.

It has lately been observed by a distinguished Christian orator, that "many profess to believe the Bible to be true, who do not believe the truths *in* the Bible;" so may we not say, that all desire the gifts of God, but they do not desire God? If we profess to love Him, it is for our own sake; when shall we begin to love Him for himself? Many who do not go the length of omitting prayer, but pray merely from custom, or education, frequently complain that they find no benefit from prayer; others, that they experience not the support and comfort promised to it. May not those who thus complain, and who, perhaps, are far from being enemies to religion, find, on a serious examination of their own hearts and lives, some irregularity in desire to be the cause of their discontent, and alleged disappointment?

We are more disposed to lay down rules for the regulation of God's government than to submit our will to it as he has settled it. If we do not now see the efficacy of the prayer which he has enjoined us to present to him, it may yet be producing its effect in another way. Infinite Wisdom is not obliged to inform us of the man-

ner, or the time, of his operations; what he expects of us is to persevere in the duty. The very obedience to the command is no small thing, whatever be its imperceptible effects.

Under the apparent failure of our prayers, the source of our repinings must be looked for in the fact of our own blindness and imperfection; for the declarations of the Gospel are sure; their answer must be found in the grace of God in Christ Jesus, for his mercies are infallible. Wherever there is disappointment, we may be assured that it is not because he is wanting to us, but because we are wanting to ourselves.

The prophet's expression, "the iniquity of our holy things," will not be thoroughly understood, except by those who thus seriously dive into the recesses of their own heart, feel their deficiencies, mark their wanderings, detect and lament their vain imaginations and impertinent thoughts. It is to be regretted that these worldly trifles are far more apt to intrude on us in prayer, than the devout affections excited by prayer are to follow us into the world. Business and pleasure break in on our devotions: when will the spirit of devotion mix with the concerns of the world?

You who lament the disappointment of your requests, suffer a few friendly hints. Have you not been impatient because you receive not the things that you asked for immediately? How do you know, but that if you had perse-

vered, God might have bestowed them? He certainly would, had He not in His wisdom foreseen they would not have been good for you; and, therefore, in his mercy withheld them. Is there not some secret, unsuspected infidelity lurking behind such impatience? Is it not virtually saying, There is no God to hear, or that he is unfaithful to his promises? For is it not absolute impiety to insinuate an accusation that the Supreme Judge of men and angels is capable of injustice, or liable to error? God has pleasure in the prosperity of his children. He neither grants nor denies any thing which is not accurately weighed and measured, which is not exactly suited to their wants, if not to their requests.

If we pray aright, it may please God, not only to grant that for which we pray, but that for which we do not pray. Supplicating for the best things, as we before observed, we may receive inferior and unrequested things, as was the case with Solomon in his prayer for wisdom. God will not forget our labour of love. If he does not seem to notice it at present, he may lay it by for a time when it may be more wanted.

In prayer we must take care not to measure our necessities by our desires; the former are few, the latter may be insatiable. A murmuring spirit is a probable cause why our petitions are not granted. He who murmurs, distrusts the

truth of God; and from distrust to infidelity the distance is not great. The certain way to prevent our obtaining what we desire, or enjoying what we have, is to feel impatient at what we do not receive, or to make an improper use of what has been granted to our prayers.

Or you may, perhaps, address God with sinister and corrupt views; as if you had left His omniscience out of His attributes; as if He might be entrapped with the "secret ambush of a specious prayer." Your design in the application of the boon you solicit may not be for His glory. It may be the prayer of ambition, cloaked under the guise of more extensive usefulness; it may be the prayer of covetousness, under the pretext of providing for your family. It may be the prayer of injustice, a petition for success in some undertaking for yourself, to the circumvention of another's fairer claim. God, in mercy to our souls, refuses the gift which would endanger them.

Thus, then, if we ask and receive not, because we ask deceitfully or blindly, we must not wonder if our prayers are not answered. Or if we obtain what we solicit, and turn it to a bad account, or to no account at all, we must not be surprised if Divine grace is withheld or withdrawn.

The same ill results may be expected if we ask formally or carelessly. Who has not felt, that there is a kind of mechanical memory in

the tongue which runs over the form, without any aid of the understanding, without any concurrence of the will, without any consent of the affections? For do we not sometimes implore God to hear a prayer, to which we ourselves are not attending? And is not this presumptuously to demand from Him that attention, which we ourselves are not giving to our own requests, even while we are in the act of making them?

A mere superficial form, by lulling the conscience, hardens the heart. The task is performed; but in what manner, or to what result, is not enquired. Genuine prayer is the homage of the soul to God, and not an expedient to pacify Him.

If you observe the form, but forget the dispositions it is intended to produce, it is evident the end of such prayer is not answered. Yet be not so far discouraged by feeling no sensible effect from prayer as to discontinue it; it is still a right thing to be found in the way of duty.

But, perhaps, you neglect to implore the Spirit of Christ towards the direction of your prayers, and His intercession for their acceptance. As there is no other name through which we can be saved, so there is no other name through which we can be heard: we must not sever His mediation from His atonement. All His divine offices are not only in perfect har-

harmony, but in inseparable union.* Or, perhaps, you have used the name of the Redeemer for form's sake, or as an accustomed close to your petitions, without imploring his efficacious grace in changing your heart, as well as in pardoning your sins.

Perhaps you think it a sufficient qualification for acceptable prayer, that you are always forming good intentions; now though these make up the chief value of good actions, yet good intentions, not acted upon when occasion invites and duty calls, will not lessen, but inflame the reckoning. For does it not look as if you had resisted the offer of that Holy Spirit, which had originally prompted the intention? And may it not induce Him to withdraw His blessed influences, when they have been both invited and rejected?

Do you never, by unwholesome reading, fill the mind with images unfavourable to serious exercises? The children of the pure and holy God should feed on the bread of their Father's house, and not on the husks of the prodigal.

Do you never use profanely or lightly that name which is above every name? He who

* We observe with regret, that in many public forms of prayer, the aid of His mediation is much more frequently implored than the benefits of His death and merits. He is, indeed, our Divine intercessor, but His mere intercession is not the whole source of our dependence on Him.

made the ear, shall He not hear? and, if He has heard, during the day, His awful name used by the thoughtless as an expletive, or by the impious as an interjection, or by the presumptuous as an imprecation, will He in the morning be called on as a Saviour, and in the evening as an Intercessor?

But it cannot be too frequently repeated, that no profession of faith, however orthodox; no avowal of trust in Christ, however confident; no entreaty for the aid of the Spirit, however customary, will avail, if it be not such an influential faith, such a practical trust, such a living devotedness, as shall be productive of holiness of heart and life, as shall tend to produce obedience to the commands, and submission to the will of God. This is an infallible test, by which you may try every doctrine, every principle of the Gospel. We do not mean the truth of them, for that is immutable; but your own actual belief, your own actual interest in them. If no such effects are visible, we deceive ourselves, and the principles we profess are not those by which we are governed.

Prayer is so obviously designed to humble the proud heart of the natural man by giving him a feeling sense of his misery, his indigence, and his helplessness, that we should be unwilling to believe, that even the proudest man can carry his pride to the throne of grace, except to supplicate deliverance from it: yet such a charac-

ter is actually drawn by Him who knew the thoughts and intents of the heart of man; and a little consideration will teach us, that the "two men who went up into the temple to pray" were not intended as individual portraits, but as specimens of a class.

The proud man does not, perhaps, always thank God that he is not guilty of adultery or extortion, to which vices he may have little temptation; nor does he glory in paying tithes and taxes, to which the law would compel him. Yet is he never disposed, like the Pharisee, to proclaim the catalogue of his own virtues? to bring in his comparative claims, as if it were a good thing to be better than the bad? Is he never disposed to carry in his eye (as if he would remind his Maker of his superiority) certain persons who are possibly less the objects of Divine displeasure than he, by his pride and selfishness, may have rendered himself; although his regularity in the forms of devotion may have made him more respectable in the world, than the poor reprobated being whom he praises God he does not resemble? It is the lowly abasement, the touching self-condemnation, the avowed poverty, the pleaded misery, of the destitute beggar that finds acceptance. It is the hungry whom God's mercy fills with good things, it is the rich in his own conceit whom His displeasure sends empty away.

Whenever you are tempted to thank God

that you are not like other men, let it be in comparing your own condition with that of the afflicted and the bereaved among your own friends; compare yourself with the paralytic on his couch; with the blind beggar by the way-side; with the labourer in the mine; think on the wretch in the galleys; on the condemned in the dungeons of despotic governments. Above all, think,— and this is the intolerable *acmé* of sin in the inflicter, and of misery in the sufferer, — think on the wretched negro chained in the hold of a slave-ship! Think seriously on these, and put pride into your prayer if you can. Think on these, not to triumph in your own superiority, but to adore the undeserved mercy of God, in giving you blessings to which you have no higher claim, and let your praise of yourself be converted into prayer for them.

For there are no dispositions of the heart which are more eminently promoted by prayer than contentment and patience. They are two qualities of the same colour, but of different shades, and are generally, when found at all, found in the same breast. Both are the offspring of genuine religion, both nurtured by cordial prayer. The cultivation of the one, under easy circumstances, prepares for the exercise of the other in more trying situations. Both emanate from the same Divine principle, but are drawn out by different occasions, and exercised under varying circumstances.

Content is the tranquillity of the heart, prayer is its aliment: it is satisfied under every dispensation of Providence, and takes thankfully its allotted portion, never enquiring whether a little more would not be a little better; knowing that if God had so judged, it would have been as easy for him to have given the more as the less. That is not true content, which does not enjoy as the gift of Infinite Wisdom what it has; nor is that true patience, which does not suffer meekly the loss of what it had, because it is not His will that it should have it longer. The language of the patient man under trials is, It is the Lord. Shall a living man complain? is his interrogation. "A good man," says Solomon, "is satisfied from himself." Here the presumptuous might put in *his* claim to the title. But his pretension arises from his mistake, for his satisfaction is *with himself*, that of the Christian with Providence; it arises from the grace of God shed abroad in his heart, which is become a perennial spring of consolation and enjoyment; and which, by persevering prayer, is indented into his very soul. Content knows how to want and how to abound: this is the language of equanimity: "Shall I not receive evil from the hand of the Lord, as well as good?" This is the language of patience. Content is always praising God for what she possesses; patience is always justifying Him for what she suffers. The cultivation of the one effectually prepares

us for the exercise of the other. But these dispositions are not inherent in the human heart. How are they generated? By the influences of the Holy Spirit. How are they kept alive? By heart-felt devotion.

Perhaps the impediment which hinders the benefit of prayer in characters apparently correct, may be the fatal habit of indulging in some secret sin, the private cherishing of some wrong propensity, the fondly entertaining of some evil imagination. Not being accustomed to control at other times, it intrudes when you would willingly expel it; for a guest, which is unreservedly let in at other seasons, and cordially entertained, will too frequently break in when you desire to be alone.

The Scriptures are explicit on this subject. It is not merely the committing actual sin that ruins the comfort growing out of prayer; the Divine prohibition runs higher: its interdiction is more intimately interior; it extends to the thoughts and intents of the heart. The door of heaven is shut against prayer under such circumstances. "If I regard iniquity in my *heart*, the Lord will not hear me." A secretly cherished corruption in the mind is the more likely to interpose between God and the soul, because it does not assume the shape and bulk of crime. A practical offence, the effect of sudden temptation, is more likely to be followed by keen repentance, deep self-abasement, and fervent

application for pardon; whereas to the close bosom-sin, knowing that no human charge can be brought against it, the soul habitually returns with a fondness facilitated by long indulgence, and only whetted by a short separation.

It was, perhaps, this acute experimental feeling which led David to pray to be delivered from "secret sins;" these, he was probably conscious, had led to those "presumptuous sins," which had entangled his soul and embittered his life; and whose dominion he so frequently and fervently deprecates. This, it is to be feared, may be the case with some, whose language and exterior cause them to be ranked with the religious; these are, at least, the dangers to which they are most exposed. It is therefore, that our Lord connects, in indissoluble union, watching with prayer.

Perhaps when the conscience is more than usually awakened, you pray with some degree of fervour to be delivered from the guilt and punishment of sin. But if you stop here, your devotion is most imperfect. If you do not also pray to be delivered from its power and dominion over your heart and life, you do not go much farther than the heathens of old. They seem to have had a strong feeling of guilt, as appears by their fond desire of expiating it by their sacrifices, lustrations, and piacula.

But such is the love of present ease, and the desire of respite, that you think, perhaps, it is

better not "to be tormented before the time." How many now in a state of irreversible misery wish they had been tormented sooner, that they might not be tormented for ever! But with you it is not yet too late. With you the day of grace, which to them is over, is not yet past. Use it then, without delay, instead of persisting in laying up fresh regrets for eternity.

But too many deceive themselves, by imagining, that when they have pronounced their prayer the duty is accomplished with the task; the occult medicine being taken, the charm is to work of itself. They consider it as a duty quite distinct and unconnected with any other. They forget that it is to produce in them a principle which is to mix with all the occurrences of the day. Prayer, though not intended as a talisman, is yet proposed as a remedy. The effect of its operation is to be seen in subduing the passions, assisting to govern the temper, in bridling the tongue, in checking not only calumny but levity; not only impure, but vain conversation.

But we have a wonderful talent at deceiving ourselves. We have not a fault for which we do not find an apology. Our ingenuity on this head is inexhaustible. In matters of religion men complain that they are weak; a complaint they are not forward to urge in worldly matters. They lament that their reluctance to pray arises from being unable to do what God, in his word,

expects them to do. But is not this virtual rebellion, only with a smooth face and a soft name? God is too wise not to know exactly what we *can* do, and too just to expect from us what we *cannot*.

This pretence of weakness, though it looks like humility, is only a mask for indolence, and a screen for selfishness.

We certainly *can* refuse to indulge ourselves in what pleases us, when we know it displeases God. We *can* obey his commandments with the aid of the infused strength which He has promised, and which we *can* ask. It is not He who is unwilling to give, but we who are averse to pray. The temptations to vice are strengthened by our passions, as our motives to virtue are weakened by them.

Our great spiritual enemy would not be so potent, if we ourselves did not put arms into his hands. The world would not be so powerful an enchantress, if we did not assist the enchantment, by voluntarily yielding to it; by insensibly forsaking him who is our strength. We make apologies for yielding to both by pleading their power and our own weakness. But the inability to resist is of our own making. Both enemies are, indeed, powerful, but they are not irresistible. If we assert the contrary, is it not virtually saying, "Greater are they that are against us, than He that is for us?"

But we are traitors to our own cause: we are

conquered by our own consent; we surrender, not so much because the conqueror is powerful, as because the conquered is willing.

Without diminishing any thing of *His* grace and glory to whom every good thought we think, every victory over sin we obtain, is owing, may it not add to our happiness, even in heaven, to look back on every conquest we here obtained by prayer over our grand spiritual enemy, every triumph over the world, every victory over ourselves? Will not the remembrance of one act of resistance then, far surpass every gratification now, which the three confederated enemies of our souls may present to us?

It is not merely by our prayers that we must give glory to God. Our Divine Master has expressly told us wherein His Father is glorified; it is "when we bring forth much fruit." It is by our works we shall be judged, and not by our prayers. And what a final consummation is it that obedience to the will of God, which is our duty here, shall be our nature hereafter! What is now our prayer shall then be our possession: there the obligation to obey shall become a necessity, and that necessity shall be happiness ineffable.

The various evils here enumerated, with many others not touched upon, are so many dead weights on the wings of prayer: they cause it to gravitate to earth, obstruct its ascent, and hinder it from piercing to the throne of God.

CHAP. VIII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER, A PRACTICAL PRAYER.

It is not customary for kings to draw up petitions for their subjects to present to themselves; much less do earthly monarchs consider the act of petitioning worthy of reward, nor do they number the petitions so much among the services done them, as among the burdens imposed on them. Whereas it is a singular benefit to our fallen race, that the King of kings himself both dictates our petitions, and has promised to recompense us for making them.

In the Lord's Prayer may be found the seminal principle of all the petitions of a Christian, both for spiritual and temporal things; and, however, in the fulness of his heart he will necessarily depart from his model in his choice of expressions; into whatever laminæ he may expand the pure gold of which it is composed; yet he will still find the general principle of his own more enlarged application to God substantially contained in this brief but finished compendium.

Is it not a striking proof of the Divine condescension, that knowing our propensity to err,

our blessed Lord should himself have dictated our petitions, partly, perhaps, as a corrective of existing superstitions, but certainly to leave behind him a *regulator* by which all future ages should *set* their devotions; and we might perhaps establish it as a safe rule for prayer in general, that any petition which cannot in some shape be accommodated to the spirit of some part of the Lord's Prayer may not be right to be adopted.

The distinction between the personal nature of Faith, and the universal character of Charity, as it is exercised in prayer, is specifically exhibited in the two pronouns which stand at the head of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer. We cannot exercise faith for another, and, therefore, can only say, *I* believe. But when we offer up our petitions, we address them to *our* Father, implying that he is the Author, Governor, and Supporter, not of ourselves only, but of his whole rational creation. It conveys also a beautiful idea of that boundless charity which links all mankind in one comprehensive brotherhood. The plural *us*, continued through the whole prayer, keeps up the sentiment with which it sets out, tends to exclude selfishness, and to excite philanthropy, by recommending to God the temporal as well as spiritual wants of the whole family of mankind.

The nomenclature of the Divinity is expressed in Scripture by every term which can

convey ideas of grandeur or of grace, of power or of affection, of sublimity or tenderness, of majesty or benignity; by every name which can excite terror or trust, which can inspire awe or consolation.

But of all compellations by which the Supreme Being is designated in his Holy Word, there is not one so soothing, so attractive, so interesting, as that of FATHER; it includes the idea of reconcilement, pardon, acceptance, love. It swallows up His grandeur in His beneficence. It involves, also, the inheritance belonging to our filial relation. It fills the mind with every image that is touching, and the heart with every feeling that is affectionate. It inspires fear softened by love, and exhibits authority mitigated by tenderness. The most endearing image the Psalmist could select from the abundant storehouse of his rich conceptions, to convey the kindest sentiment of God's pity towards them that fear Him, was that it resembles the pity of a "father for his *own children.*" In directing us to pray to our Father, our Divine Master does not give the command without the example. He every where uses the term He recommends. "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth!" And in the seventeenth of St. John he uses this tender name no less than seven times.

"Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," was the ill-understood prayer of the enquir-

ing disciples. To us this petition is granted, before it is made. Does He not show himself to all as a Father, in the miracles of his creation, in the wonders of our being, preservation, and support? Has He not, in a more especial manner, revealed Himself to us as a Father in the sublime wonders of His Word, in the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the perpetuated gift of the Holy Spirit? Does he not show Himself our Father, if, when we have done evil, He withholds his chastening hand; if, when we have sinned, He still bears with us; if, when we are deaf to his call, He repeats it; if, when we delay, He waits for us; if, when we repent, He pardons us; if, when we return, He receives us; if, when in danger, He preserves us from falling; and if, when we fall, He raises us?

We have a beautiful illustration of the goodness of God as a merciful and tender Father in the deeply affecting parable of the Prodigal Son. Though the undone spendthrift knew that he had no possible claim on the goodness he had so notoriously offended, yet he felt that the endearing name of Father had an eloquence that might plead for forgiveness of his offence, though, he feared, not for restoration to affection and favour. But while he only meekly aspired to a place among the servants, while he only humbly pleaded for a little of their redundant bread, he was received as a pardoned, reconciled, beloved child.

Our Lord's introduction, "Pray ye, therefore, after this *manner*," neither forbids digression nor amplification. The recollection that His dwelling-place is in heaven is calculated to remind us of the immeasurable distance between the petitioner and his God, and to encourage us to communicate with the Father of Spirits: with Him who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders;" and which of His wonders is more astonishing than this inconceivably marvellous condescension?

Christianity, we must repeat, is a practical religion, and the Prayer our Lord has given us is a practical Prayer; and in order to use it aright, we must model our life by it as well as our petitions.

If praying for our "daily bread" is a petition expressing our dependence, it is also a petition of temperance. It teaches us to subordinate our desires after worldly things, and to ask for them in great moderation. It is worth observing, that requests for temporal blessings and spiritual mercies are so interwoven in this perfect form, that in repeating it, we cannot pray for our "daily bread," without imploring "forgiveness of our trespasses."

"Deliverance from evil" is a petition of indefinite extent, and is closely connected with that which precedes it. God cannot "lead us into temptation," but His Providence may lead us into situations which, acting on the corruption

of our hearts, may eventually produce the evil we deprecate.

When we pray, therefore, not to be "led into temptation," we are asking of God to cure those sinful propensities which are likely to expose us to it, and to preserve us from those circumstances which, by subjecting us to difficulty and danger, may terminate in sin.

Temptation, in the language of Scripture, frequently implies probation; a trial sent in order to lay open our real character. Thus God, in tempting Abraham, gave occasion to that illustrious exemplification of faith and obedience in this devoted patriarch. God is also said to *try* Hezekiah. This trial led him into the vain display of his magnificence and wealth before the foreign ambassadors. The Searcher of Hearts already knew this infirmity; yet it is said by the sacred historian, that "God left him to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart." Doubtless the public exposure of his pride was calculated to lead Hezekiah to subsequent repentance and humility; — for, in spite of this error, he was eminently conspicuous among the awfully few pious kings of Judah.

If we pray that the name of God may be hallowed, yet neglect to hallow it ourselves, by *family* as well as personal devotion, and a conscientious attendance on all the ordinances of public worship, we defeat the end of our praying, by falling short of its obligation.

The discrepancies between our prayers and our practice do not end here. How frequently are we solemnly imploring of God, that "His kingdom may come," while we are doing nothing to promote His kingdom of grace here, and consequently His kingdom of glory hereafter.

If we pray that God would "give His Son the heathen for his inheritance," and yet make it a matter of indifference whether a vast proportion of the globe should live heathens or die Christians: if we pray that "the knowledge of the Lord may cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea," yet act as if we were indifferent whether Christianity ended as well as began at home; if we pray that "the sound may go out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world," and yet are satisfied to keep the sound within our own hearing, and the words within our own island, is not this a prayer which goeth out of feigned lips? When we pray that "His will may be done," we know that His will is, that "all should be saved, that not one should perish." When, therefore, we assist in sending the Gospel to the dark and distant corners of the earth, then, and not till then, may we consistently desire of God in our prayers, that His saving health may be known to all nations.

In praying, therefore, that "His kingdom may come," do we not pray that all false religions, all idolatrous worship, may be universally abolished, and the kingdom of Messiah be established throughout the world?

For we must vindicate the veracity of our prayer by our exertions, and extend its efficiency by our influence.

It is, indeed, an easier and a cheaper way to quiet the conscience by that common anodyne, "That the heathen are very well as they are; that the morals of the Hindoos are not inferior to those of Christians." With what sort of Christians these asserters of the rival innocence of idolaters associate, we will not pretend to determine.

But, allowing that we do not always send abroad the very best samples of Christianity, the very best representatives of its practical effects, —allowing, also, that too many who remain at home, and who profess and call themselves Christians, are guilty of crimes which disgrace human nature, yet Christianity renounces them; Christian governments inflict on them capital punishments. While among these poor idolaters all the social duties are trampled on, all the suggestions of natural conscience are stifled, rites the most obscene, sacrifices the most bloody, are offered; and these crimes are not only committed, but sanctioned, but enjoined; they do not violate religion, they make a part of it. Surely, then, politically connected with them as we are, and yet contentedly leaving them in their degraded state of morals, without any attempt for their improvement, do we not by this neglect virtually pronounce, and awfully

anticipate, their dreadful sentence, "Let him that is unjust be unjust still, and he that is filthy let him be filthy still?"

Again, it is an easier and a cheaper way to throw the weight off our own shoulders by the cool remark, that "these things belong not to us; human efforts are superfluous; God must bring them about by a miracle."—God, it is true, introduced Christianity by miracles, but He carries it on by means. Miracles, indeed, are His prerogative, but man is His instrument. Had He not sent His Gospel and His ministers, it is probable that the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bythinia, and all proconsular Asia, had never heard of Christianity to this day.

But is it not equally the effect of Divine grace, I had almost said, is it not equally a miracle, when, in the hottest season of the most unrelenting warfare, in the most calamitous period of unusual scarcity, when Britain had the whole civilised world in arms against her, so that she could emphatically say, "There is none that fighteth for us but only Thou, O God,"—when it might seem business enough for any but Christians to take care of themselves;—even then Britain raised the banner of the cross, not in the most unprofitable crusade for the most fruitless object, but that she might carry the knowledge of Him who suffered on it to the ends of the habitable globe;—not to re-

deem His sepulchre from infidels, but to communicate to them the tidings of His resurrection, and of redemption through His blood? Is it not the effect of grace, and still more nearly approaching to a miracle, when in a period immediately subsequent, while their fields were yet red with slaughter, and their rivers ran blood, their cities plundered, and their kingdoms desolated, God disposed the hearts of hostile sovereigns, ruling over opposing nations, the tenacious professors of different religions, yet, as if actuated by one universal feeling, simultaneously to rise up in one common cause for the accomplishment of this mighty object,—when the first use they made of the termination of war was to disseminate the Gospel of peace,—the first tribute they paid to the glory of God was to publish abroad that grand instrument of good will to men? Let us not then indulge groundless imaginations, as if miracles were wrought to justify indolence; as if man were to be excused the trouble of being the active agent of Divine Providence.

The miracles wrought at Ephesus seem to have been intended as a confirmation of the truth of St. Paul's doctrine, rather than as the actual instrument of conversion. Many rejected the Gospel who saw the miracles. The miracles wrought did not supersede the necessity of the Apostle's "speaking boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the

things concerning the kingdom of God." They did not supersede the necessity, at another time, of his continuing to preach among them, for the space of two years, the two great doctrines of his mission, "Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Nor did they prevent his thinking it his bounden duty to send to the Ephesians his exquisite epistle, for the furtherance of their faith in the Gospel. Here we behold the union of the BIBLE and the MISSIONARY — of the Gospel sent, and the Gospel preached.

"Many," says the sagacious Bishop Butler, "think there is but one evil, and that evil is superstition;" and we know that the epithets of superstitious and enthusiastic have been unsparingly lavished on the most sober and well-digested plans for the dispersion of the Scriptures abroad.

But the truth is, *they* are neither enthusiasts nor superstitious, who believe that well-concerted and prudently-conducted societies for the promotion of this great object, acting with a deep sense of human imperfection, and in dependence upon the favour of God, will, in due time, with His blessing, without which nothing is strong, nothing is holy, accomplish the great end of bringing all the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdoms of the Redeemer. But *he* is the superstitious, *he* is the enthusiast, who indulges unfounded expectations, who looks

for the fulfilment of declarations which have never been made, who depends upon miracles which have never been announced, who looks for consequences without their predisposing causes, who believes that the unassisted heathen, sunk in intellectual and spiritual darkness, shall call on Him of whom they have not heard, or that they shall hear without a preacher, or that the preacher will be found without being sent.

We might just as reasonably expect to see the beautiful imagery of Oriental metaphor, as displayed in the highly figurative language of the prophets, actually realised. We might as reasonably expect that the rose of Sharon should literally blossom in the wilderness of Arabia, or the cedars of Lebanon spring up in the sandy valleys of Africa; that the thirsty desert should produce spontaneous springs of water; that the tame and savage animals should live together in friendly compact; that the material hills should really sink and the valleys rise of themselves: — we might as rationally hope to see these lively illustrations of the fulfilment of the Divine promises literally verified, as to expect Christianity to make its own unassisted way into the distant and desolate corners of the earth. God has committed Christianity into the hands of Christians for universal diffusion.

The Almighty is consistent in all His oper-

ations. He resigns to human agency, under His blessing, to provide for the spiritual wants of the ignorant, as well as the temporal wants of the indigent. Christianity and riches are deposited in the hands of Christians, for the more general dispersion of both to the respectively destitute.

And when, if ever, through the unmerited mercy of God, that glorious and devoutly-desired day shall arrive, which warms the heart even in the distant perspective of prophecy, "when nation shall no more rise against nation, and they shall learn war no more;" what is so likely to hasten that triumphant period, what is so likely to turn the sword into the pruning-hook, and to establish lasting peace throughout the world, as that spirit of love and concord which the universal diffusion of Gospel-light is calculated to impart? What is so likely to produce charity among all the children of the same common Father, as when subjects as well as sovereigns of every clime and colour, people and language, shall be brought to know God, from the greatest to the least?

Those admirable institutions, the BIBLE and MISSIONARY Societies, whose object it is to lead to this blessed consummation, have already enlarged the borders of Christian charity to an almost indefinite extent, by bringing into contact, from every point of the compass, and from almost every city in the civilised world, Christians

who had not so much as heard of each other's existence; it has already shown them that whatever difference of education and of government, whatever modifications of opinion had hitherto divided them, the great fundamental principles of love to God, of faith in his Son, and charity to the souls of men, are, at length, beginning to draw them into a nearer connection. These general principles of agreement are already bringing into one point of union persons whom difference of sentiment had kept asunder as widely as seas had separated, and are the only means, as far as human penetration can foresee, of drawing the cords of amity into still closer bonds.

Already, even in the early stage of this vast enterprise, may we not perceive that it has had a considerable share in promoting mutual good will, reciprocal kindness, and growing confidence, and this with foreigners, who, though they had subdued their enmity, might not so soon have conquered their jealousy? Has it not a powerful tendency to cure any remaining distrust, to confirm good faith, to promote confidence and attachment between nations, whose respect was not, perhaps, altogether untinctured with suspicion? May it not break down the wall of partition, which has so long kept us asunder? May it not bring those who were aforetime separated in heart as well as country to unite in Christian brotherhood? May not

the probable results of this Christian confederacy become a ratification between monarchs, firmer than any political compact, stronger than any diplomatic convention? For is it not an instrument of confederation of which the GREAT SEAL IS THE WORD OF GOD? Does it not embrace the two sublime objects of the song of the angelic host, by uniting "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will toward men?"

There is in the Lord's Prayer a concatenation of the several clauses; what in human composition the critics call concealed method. The petitions rise out of each other. Every part also is, as it were, fenced round, the whole meeting in a circle; for the desire that God's name may be hallowed, His will be done, and His kingdom come, with which the prayer opens, is referred to, and confirmed by, the ascription at the close. If the kingdom, the power, and the glory, are His, then His ability to do and to give is declared to be infinite.

CHAP. IX.

THE LORD'S PRAYER CONTINUED. — "THY WILL BE DONE."

THE Holy Scriptures frequently comprise the essence of the Christian temper in some short aphorism, apostrophe, or definition. The essential spirit of the Christian life may be said to be included in this one brief petition of the LORD'S PRAYER, "THY WILL BE DONE."

There is a haughty spirit which, though it will not complain, does not care to submit. It arrogates to itself the dignity of enduring, without any claim to the meekness of yielding. Its silence is stubbornness; its fortitude is pride; its calmness is apathy without, and discontent within. In such characters it is not so much the will of God, which is the rule of conduct, as the scorn of pusillanimity. Not seldom, indeed, the mind puts in a claim for a merit to which the nerves could make out a better title. Yet the suffering which arises from acute feeling is so far from deducting from the virtue of resignation, that, when it does not impede the sacrifice, it enhances the value. True resignation is the hardest lesson in the whole school of

Christ. It is the oftenest taught and the latest learnt. It is not a task which, when once got over in some particular instance, leaves us master of the subject. The necessity of following up the lesson we have begun presents itself almost every day in some new shape, occurs under some fresh modification. The submission of yesterday does not exonerate us from the resignation of to-day. The principle, indeed, once thoroughly wrought into the soul, gradually reconciles us to the frequent demand for its exercise, and renders every successive call more easy.

We read dissertations on this subject, not only with the most entire concurrence of the judgment, but with the most apparent conviction of the mind. We write essays upon it in the hour of peace and composure, and fancy that what we have discussed with so much ease and self-complacence, in favour of which we offer so many arguments to convince, and so many motives to persuade, cannot be very difficult to practise. But to convince the understanding and to correct the will is a very different undertaking; and not less difficult when it comes to our own case than it was in the case of those for whom we have been so coolly and dogmatically prescribing. It is not till we practically find how slowly our own arguments produce any effect on ourselves that we cease to marvel at their inefficacy on others. The sick physician

tastes with disgust the bitterness of the draught, to the swallowing of which he wondered the patient had felt so much repugnance; and the reader is sometimes convinced by the arguments which fail of their effect on the writer, when he is called, not to discuss but to act, not to reason but to suffer. The theory is so just and the duty so obvious, that even bad men assent to it; the exercise so trying, that the best men find it more easy to commend the rule than to adopt it. But he who has once gotten engraved, not in his memory but in his heart, this Divine precept, THY WILL BE DONE, has made a proficiency which will render all subsequent instruction comparatively easy.

Though sacrifices and oblations were offered to God under the law by His own express appointment, yet he peremptorily rejected them by his prophets, when presented as substitutes instead of signs. Will He, under a more perfect dispensation, accept of any observances which are meant to supersede internal dedication, — of any offerings unaccompanied by complete desire of acquiescence in his will? "My son, give me thine *heart*," is His brief but imperative command. But, before we can be brought to comply with the spirit of this requisition, God must enlighten our understanding, that our devotion may be rational; He must rectify our will, that it may be voluntary; He must purify our heart, that it may be spiritual.

Submission is a duty of such high and holy import, that it can only be learnt of the Great Teacher. If it could have been acquired by mere moral institution, the wise sayings of the ancient philosophers would have taught it. But their most elevated standard was low: their strongest motives were the brevity of life, the instability of fortune, the dignity of suffering virtue, things within their narrow sphere of judging; things true, indeed, as far as they go, but a substratum by no means equal to the superstructure to be built on it. It wanted depth, and strength, and solidity, for the purposes of support. It wanted the only true basis, the assurance that God orders all things according to the purposes of his will for our final good; it wanted that only sure ground of faith by which the genuine Christian cheerfully submits in entire dependence on the promises of the Gospel.

Nor let us fancy that we are to be languid and inactive recipients of the Divine dispensations. Our own souls must be enlarged, our own views must be ennobled, our own spirit must be dilated. An inoperative acquiescence is not all that is required of us; — and, if we must not slacken our zeal in doing good, so we must not be remiss in opposing evil, on the flimsy ground that God has permitted evil to infest the world. If it be His will to permit sin, it is an opposition to His will when we do not

labour to counteract it. This surrender, therefore, of our will to that of God, takes in a large sweep of actual duties, as well as the whole compass of passive obedience. It involves doing as well as suffering, activity as well as acquiescence, zeal as well as forbearance. Yet the concise petition daily slips off the tongue without our reflecting on the weight of the obligation we are imposing on ourselves. We do not consider the extent and consequences of the prayer we are offering, the sacrifices, the trials, the privations it may involve, and the large indefinite obedience to all the known and unknown purposes of Infinite Wisdom to which we are pledging ourselves.

There is no case in which we more shelter ourselves in generalities. Verbal sacrifices cost little, cost nothing. The familiar habit of repeating the petition almost tempts us to fancy that the duty is as easy as the request is short. We are ready to think that a prayer rounded off in four monosyllables can scarcely involve duties co-extensive with our whole course of being; that in uttering them, we renounce all right in ourselves; that we acknowledge the universal indefeasible title of *the blessed and only Potentate;* that we make over to Him the right to do in us, and with us, and by us, whatever He sees good for ourselves, whatever will promote His glory, though by means sometimes as incomprehensible to our understanding as un-

acceptable to our will, because we neither know the motive nor perceive the end. These simple words, THY WILL BE DONE, express an act of faith the most sublime, an act of allegiance the most unqualified; and, while they make a declaration of entire submission to a Sovereign the most absolute, they are, at the same time, a recognition of love to a Father the most beneficent.

We must remember, that in offering this prayer, we may, by our own request, be offering to resign what we most dread to lose, to give up what is dear to us as our own soul; we may be calling on our heavenly Father to withhold what we are most anxiously labouring to attain, and to withdraw what we are most sedulously endeavouring to keep. We are solemnly renouncing our property in ourselves, we are distinctly making ourselves over again to Him whose we already are. We specifically entreat Him to do with us what He pleases, to mould us to a conformity to His image, without which we shall never be resigned to His will; in short, to dispose of us as His infinite wisdom sees best, however contrary to the scheme which our blindness has laid down as the path to unquestionable happiness.

To render this trying petition easy to us, is one great reason why God, by such a variety of providences, afflicts and brings us low. He knows that we want incentives to humility, even more than incitements to virtuous actions. He

shows us, in many ways, that self-sufficiency and happiness are incompatible; that pride and peace are irreconcilable; that, following our own way, and doing our own will, which we conceive to be the very essence of felicity, is in direct opposition to it.

Under the pressure of any affliction, *Thy will be done*, as it is the patient Christian's unceasing prayer, so it is the ground of his unvarying practice. In this brief petition he finds his whole duty comprised and expressed. It is the unprompted request of his lips, it is the motto inscribed on his heart, it is the principle which regulates his life, it is the voice which says to the stormy passions, "Peace! be still!" Let others expostulate, he submits. Nay, even submission does not adequately express his feelings. We frequently submit, not so much from duty as from necessity; we submit, because we cannot help ourselves. Resignation sometimes may be mere acquiescence in the sovereignty, rather than conviction of the wisdom and goodness of God; while the patient Christian not only yields to the dispensation, but adores the dispenser. He not only submits to the blow, but vindicates the hand which inflicts it: "The Lord is righteous in all his ways." He refers to the chastisement as a proof of the affection of the chastiser: "I know that in very faithfulness Thou hast caused me to be afflicted." He recurs to the thoughtlessness of his former prosperity:

" Before I was afflicted I went astray;" and alludes to the trial less as a punishment than a paternal correction. If he prays for a removal of the present suffering, he prays also that it may not be removed from him, till it has been sanctified to him. He will not even part from the trial, till he has laid hold on the benefit.

" Christianity," says Bishop Horsley, " involves many paradoxes, but no contradictions." To be able to say with entire surrender of the heart, " Thy will be done," is the true liberty of the children of God, that liberty with which Christ has made us free. It is a liberty, not which delivers us from restraint, but which, freeing us from our subjection to the senses, makes us find no pleasure but in order, no safety but in the obedience of an intelligent being to his rightful Lord. In delivering us from the heavy bondage of sin, it transfers us to the " easy yoke of Christ," from the galling slavery of the world to the " light burden" of him who overcame it.

This liberty, in giving a true direction to the affections, gives them amplitude as well as elevation. The more unconstrained the will becomes, the more it fixes on one object: once fixed on the highest, it does not use its liberty for versatility, but for constancy; not for change, but fidelity; not for wavering, but adherence.

It is, therefore, no less our interest than our duty, to keep the mind in an habitual

posture of submission. "Adam," says Dr. Hammond, "after his expulsion, was a greater slave in the wilderness than he had been in the enclosure." If the barbarian ambassador came expressly to the Romans to negotiate from his country for permission to be their servants, declaring, that a voluntary submission, even to a foreign power, was preferable to a wild and disorderly freedom, well may the Christian triumph in the peace and security to be attained by a complete subjugation to Him who is emphatically called *the God of order*.

A vital faith manifests itself in vital acts. "Thy will be done," is eminently a practical petition. The first indication of the gaoler's change of heart was a practical indication. He did not ask, "Are there few that be saved?" but, "What shall *I* do to be saved?" The first symptom St. Paul gave of his conversion was a practical symptom: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to *do?*" He entered on his new course with a total renunciation of his own will. It seemed to this great apostle to be the turning point between infidelity and piety, whether he should follow his own will, or the will of God. He did not amuse his curiosity with speculative questions. His own immediate and grand concern engrossed his whole soul. Nor was his question a mere hasty effusion, an interrogative springing out of that mixed feeling of awe and wonder which accompanied his first overwhelm-

ing convictions. It became the abiding principle which governed his future life, which made him in labours more abundant. Every successive act of duty, every future sacrifice of ease, sprung from it, was influenced by it. His own will, his ardent, impetuous, fiery will, was not merely subdued, it was extinguished. His powerful mind, indeed, lost none of its energy, but his proud heart relinquished all its independence.

We allow and adopt the term *devotion* as an indispensable part of religion, because it is supposed to be limited to the act; but *devotedness*, from which it is derived, does not meet with such ready acceptation, because this is a habit, and a habit involves more than an act; it pledges us to consistency, it implies fixedness of character, a general confirmed state of mind, a giving up what we are, and have, and do, to God. Devotedness does not consist in the length of our prayers, nor in the number of our good works, for, though these are the surest evidences of piety, they are not its essence. Devotedness consists in doing and suffering, bearing and forbearing, in the way which God prescribes. The most inconsiderable duty performed with alacrity, if it opposes our own inclination, the most ordinary trial, met with a right spirit, is more acceptable to Him than a greater effort of our own devising. We do not commend a servant for his activity, if ever so

fervently exercised, in doing whatever gratifies his own fancy; we do not consider his performance as obedience, unless his activity has been exercised in doing what we required of him. Now, how can we insist on his doing what contradicts his own humour, while we allow ourselves to feel repugnance in serving our heavenly Master, when His commands do not exactly fall in with our own inclination?

Nothing short, then, of this sincere devotedness to God can enable us to maintain an equality of mind under unequal circumstances. We murmur that we have not the things we ask amiss, not knowing that they are withheld by the same mercy by which the things that are good for us are granted. Things good in themselves may not be good for us. A resigned spirit is the proper disposition to prepare us for receiving mercies, or for having them denied. Resignation of soul, like the allegiance of a good subject, is always in readiness, though not always in action; whereas an impatient mind is a spirit of disaffection, always prepared to revolt when the will of the sovereign is in opposition to that of the subject. This seditious principle is the infallible characteristic of an unrenewed mind.

We must also give God leave, not only to take His own way, but His own time. The appointment of seasons, as well as of events, is His. "He waits to be gracious." If he delays, it is because we are not yet brought to that state

which fits us for the grant of our request. It is not He who must be brought about, but we ourselves. Or, perhaps, He refuses the thing we ask, in order to give us a better. We implore success in an undertaking, instead of which, He gives us content under the disappointment. We ask for the removal of pain; He gives us patience under it. We desire deliverance from our enemies; He sees that we have not yet turned their enmity to our improvement, and He will bring us to a better temper, by further exercise. We desire Him to avert some impending trial; instead of averting it, He takes away its bitterness; He mitigates what we believed would be intolerable, by giving us a right temper under it. How, then, can we say He has failed of His promise, if He gives something more truly valuable than we had requested at His hands?

A sincere love of God will make us thankful when our prayers are granted, and patient and cheerful when they are denied. Every fresh disappointment will teach us to distrust ourselves, and confide in God. Experience will instruct us that there may be a better way of hearing our requests than that of granting them. Happy for us that He to whom they are addressed knows what is best, and acts upon that knowledge.

CHAP. X.

A SLIGHT SCHEME OF PRAYER, PROPOSED FOR YOUNG PERSONS, ON THE MODEL OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

WILL the pious mother pardon the liberty here taken of suggesting the few following hints? Those who are aware of the inestimable value of prayer themselves will naturally be anxious, not only that this duty should be earnestly inculcated on their children, but that they should be taught it in the best manner; and *such* parents need little persuasion or counsel on the subject. Yet children of decent and orderly (I will not say of strictly religious) families are often so superficially instructed in this important business, that when they are asked what prayers they use, it is not unusual for them to answer, "The Lord's Prayer and the *Creed*." And even some who are better taught are not always made to understand with sufficient clearness the specific distinction between the two, that the one is the confession of their *faith*, and the other the model for their *supplications*. By this confused and indistinct beginning, they set out with a perplexity in their ideas, which is not always completely disentangled in more advanced life.

An intelligent mother will seize the first occasion which the child's opening understanding shall allow, for making a little course of lectures on the Lord's Prayer, taking every division or short sentence separately, for each furnishes valuable materials for a distinct lecture. Children should be led gradually through every part of this Divine composition; they should be taught to break it into all the regular divisions into which, indeed, it so naturally resolves itself. They should be made to comprehend, one by one, each of its short but weighty sentences; to amplify and spread them out for the purpose of better understanding them, not in their most extensive and critical sense, but in their most simple and obvious meanings; for in these condensed and substantial expressions, as we have before observed, every word is an ingot, and will bear beating out; so that the teacher's difficulty will not so much consist in what she shall say, as in what she shall suppress; so abundant is the expository matter which this succinct pattern suggests.

When children have acquired a pretty good conception of the meaning of each division, they should then be made to observe the connection, relation, and dependence of the several parts of this Prayer, one upon another; for there is great method and connection in it. A judicious interpreter will observe how logically and consequently one clause grows out of another, though

she will use neither the word logical nor consequence; for all explanations should be made in the most plain and familiar terms, it being words, and not things, which commonly perplex children, if, as it sometimes happens, the teacher, though not wanting sense, wants perspicuity and simplicity.

Young persons, from being completely instructed in this short composition, (which, as it is to be their guide and model through life, too much pains cannot be bestowed on it,) will have a clearer conception, not only of its individual contents, but of Prayer in general, than many ever attain, though their memory has been, perhaps, loaded with long and unexplained forms, which they have been accustomed to swallow in the lump, without scrutiny and without discrimination.

I would have it understood, that by these little comments I do not mean that children should be put to learn dry, and, to them, unintelligible expositions; but that the exposition is to be colloquial. And here I must remark in general, that the teacher is sometimes unreasonably apt to relieve herself at the child's expense, by loading the *memory* of a little creature on occasions in which far other faculties should be put in exercise. Children themselves should be made to furnish a good part of this extemporaneous commentary by their answers; in which answers they will be much assisted by the judg-

ment the teacher uses in her manner of questioning. And the youthful understanding, when its powers are properly set at work, will soon strengthen by exercise, so as to furnish reasonable, if not very correct, answers.

Written forms of prayer are not only useful and proper, but indispensably necessary to begin with. But I will hazard the remark, that if children are thrown *exclusively* on the best forms, if they are made to commit them to memory like a copy of verses, and to repeat them in a dry customary way, they will produce little effect on their minds. They will not understand what they repeat, if we do not early open to them the important *scheme* of prayer. Without such an elementary introduction to this duty, they will afterwards be either ignorant, or enthusiastic, or both. We should give them *knowledge* before we can expect them to make much progress in *piety*, and as a due preparative to it: Christian instruction in this resembling the sun, who, in the course of his communications, gives light before he gives heat. And to labour to excite a spirit of devotion without first infusing that knowledge out of which it is to grow, is practically reviving the popish maxim, that Ignorance is the mother of Devotion, and virtually adopting the popish rule, of praying in an unknown tongue.

Children, let me again observe, will not attend to their prayers if they do not understand

them; and they will not understand them, if they are not taught to analyse, to dissect them, to know their component parts, and to methodise them.

It is not enough to teach them to consider prayer under the general idea that it is an application to God for what they want, and an acknowledgment to Him for what they have. This, though true in the gross, is not sufficiently precise and correct. They should learn to define and to arrange all the different parts of prayer. And as a preparative to prayer itself, they should be impressed with as clear an idea as their capacity and the nature of the subject will admit, of "HIM with whom they have to do." His omnipresence is, perhaps, of all his attributes, that of which we may make the first practical use. Every head of prayer is founded on some great scriptural truth, which truths the little analysis here suggested will materially assist to fix in their minds.

On the knowledge that "God is," that he is an infinitely holy Being, and that "he is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him," will be grounded the first part of prayer, which is *adoration*. The creature devoting itself to the Creator, or *self-dedication*, next presents itself. And if they are first taught that important truth, that as needy creatures they want help, which may be done by some easy analogy, they will easily be led to understand how naturally *peti-*

tion forms a most considerable branch of prayer; and Divine grace being among the things for which they are to petition, this naturally suggests to the mind the doctrine of the influences of the Holy Spirit. And when to this is added the conviction which will be readily worked into an ingenuous mind, that as offending creatures they want pardon, the necessity of *confession* will easily be made intelligible to them. But they should be brought to understand that it must not be such a general and vague confession as awakens no sense of personal humiliation, as excites no recollection of their own more peculiar and individual faults. But it must be a confession founded on self-knowledge, which is itself to arise out of the practice of self-examination. On the gladness of heart natural to youth, it will be less difficult to impress the delightful duty of *thanksgiving*, which forms so considerable a branch of devotion. In this they should be habituated to recapitulate not only their general, but to enumerate their peculiar, daily, and incidental mercies, in the same specific manner as they should have been taught to detail their individual and personal *wants* in the petitionary, and their *faults* in the confessional, part. The same warmth of feeling which will more readily dispose them to express their gratitude to God in thanksgiving, will also lead them more gladly to express their love to their parents and friends, by adopting another indis-

pensable, and, to an affectionate heart, pleasing, part of prayer, which is *intercession*. It will be needful to inform them that the omission of this important clause in the *Lord's Prayer* arises from the Divine Intercessor not having then assumed his mediatorial office.

When they have been made, by a plain and perspicuous mode of instruction, fully to understand the different nature of all these; and when they clearly comprehend that *adoration*, *self-dedication*, *confession*, *petition*, *thanksgiving*, and *intercession*, are distinct heads, which must not be involved in each other, you may exemplify the rules by pointing out to them these successive branches in any well-written form. It is hardly needful to remind the teacher that our truly Scriptural Liturgy invariably furnishes the example of presenting *every* request in the name of the great Mediator. For there is no access to the Throne of Grace but by *that new and living way*. In the Liturgy, too, they will meet with the best exemplifications of prayers, exhibiting separate specimens of each of the distinct heads we have been suggesting.

But in order that the minds of young persons may, without labour or difficulty, be gradually brought into such a state of preparation as to be benefited by such a little course of lectures as we have recommended, they should, from the time when they were first able to read, have been employing themselves, at their leisure hours, in

laying in a store of provision for their present demands. And here the *memory* may be employed to good purpose; for being the first faculty which is ripened, and which is, indeed, perfected when the others are only beginning to unfold themselves, this is an intimation of Providence that it should be the first seized on for the best uses. It should, therefore, be devoted to lay in a stock of the more easy and devotional parts of Scripture, especially the Psalms.* Children, whose minds have been early well furnished from these, will be competent at nine or ten years old to produce from them, and to select with no contemptible judgment, suitable examples of all the parts of prayer; and will be able to extract and appropriate texts under each respective head, so as to exhibit, without help, complete specimens of every part of prayer. By confining them entirely to the sense, and nearly to the words of Scripture, they will be preserved from enthusiasm, from irregularity, and conceit. By being obliged continually to apply for themselves, they will get a habit, in all their difficulties, of "searching the Scriptures,"

* This will be so far from spoiling the cheerfulness, or impeding the pleasures, of childhood, that the Author knows a lady, who, when a little girl, before she was seven years old, had learnt the whole Psalter through a second time; and that without any diminution of uncommon gaiety of spirits, or any interference with the elegant acquirements suited to her station.

which may be hereafter useful to them on other and more trying occasions. But I would at first *confine* them to the Bible; for were they allowed with equal freedom to ransack other books with a view to get helps to embellish their little compositions, or rather compilations, they might be tempted to pass off for their own what they pick up from others, which might tend at once to make them both vain and deceitful. This is a temptation to which they are too much laid open, when they find themselves extravagantly commended for any pilfered passage with which they decorate their little themes and letters. But in the present instance there is no danger of any similar deception; for there is such a sacred signature stamped on every Scripture phrase, that the owner's name can never be defaced or torn off from the goods, either by fraud or violence.

It would be well, if in those Psalms which children were first directed to get by heart, an eye were had to this their future application; and that they were employed, but without any intimation of your subsequent design, in learning such as may be best turned to this account. In the hundred and thirty-ninth, the first great truth to be imprinted on the young heart, the Divine Omnipresence, as was before observed, is unfolded with such a mixture of majestic grandeur, and such an interesting variety of intimate and local circumstances, as is likely to

seize on the quick and lively feelings of youth. The awful idea that that Being whom they are taught to reverence is not only *in general* "acquainted with all their ways," but that He is "about their path, and about their bed," bestows such a sense of real and local existence on Him, of whom they are apt to conceive as having his distant habitation only in heaven, as will greatly help to realise the sense of his actual presence.

The hundred and third Psalm will open to the mind rich and abundant sources of expression for gratitude and thanksgiving, and it includes the acknowledgment of spiritual as well as temporal favours. It illustrates the compassionate mercies of God by familiar and domestic images of such peculiar tenderness and exquisite endearment, as are calculated to strike upon every chord of filial fondness in the heart of an affectionate child. The fifty-first supplies an infinite variety of matter in whatever relates to confession of sin, or to supplication for the aids of the Spirit. The twenty-third abounds with captivating expressions of the protecting goodness and tender love of their heavenly Father, conveyed by pastoral imagery of uncommon beauty and sweetness: in short, the greater part of these charming compositions overflows with materials for every head of prayer.

Children who, while they were engaged in learning these select Scriptures, were not aware

that there was any specific object in view, or any further end to be answered by it, will afterwards feel an unexpected pleasure arising from the application of their petty labours, when they are called to draw out from their little treasury of knowledge the stores which they have been insensibly collecting; and will be pleased to find that, without any fresh application to study, they are now obliged to exercise a higher faculty than memory,— that they have lying ready in their minds the materials with which they are at length called upon to work. Their judgment must be exercised in selecting one, or two, or more texts, which shall contain the substance of every specific head of prayer before noticed; and it will be a farther exercise to their understandings to concatenate the detached parts into one regular whole, occasionally varying the arrangement as they like; that is, changing the order, sometimes beginning with invocation, sometimes with confession; sometimes dwelling longer on one part, sometimes on another.—As the hardships of a religious Sunday are often so pathetically pleaded as making one of the heavy burdens of religion; and as the friends of religion are so often called upon to mitigate its intolerable rigours, by recommending pleasant employment, might not such an exercise as has been here suggested assist, by varying its occupations, to lighten its supposed load?

The habits of the pupils being thus early

formed, their memory, attention, and intellect being bent in a right direction, and the exercise invariably maintained, may we not reasonably hope that their *affections* also, through Divine grace, may become interested in the work, till they will be enabled "to pray with the Spirit and with the understanding also?" They will now be qualified to use a well-composed form, with seriousness and advantage; for they will now use it not mechanically, but rationally. That which before appeared to them a mere mass of good words will now appear a significant composition, exhibiting variety, regularity, and beauty; and while they will have the further advantage of being enabled, by their improved judgment, to distinguish and select for their own purpose such prayers as are more judicious and more scriptural, it will also habituate them to look for plan, and design, and lucid order, in other works.

CHAP. XI.

OF PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER AND PRAISE.

A DEEP sense of his corruptions will powerfully draw the real penitent to a humble avowal of sin; but it is to be feared that there are some, who, because they cannot charge themselves with flagrant offences, do not consider a contrite confession of the sins of the heart and of the daily life an indispensable part of their devotions. But God will charge many with sin who neglect to charge themselves. Did they attend to the remonstrances of a conscience not laid asleep by neglect, or quieted by palliatives, they would find, that, were the daily *omissions* alone, whether in prayer or conduct, of even their best days, registered and presented to them, they would form no inconsiderable catalogue for repentance.

There are too many who do not consider that all sins are equally a breach of the Divine law. Without pretending to bring all sins, small and great, to one common level, we should remember that *all* sin is an offence against a gracious Father.

In that profoundly self-abasing prayer of David, after the commission of the two black offences which disgraced his otherwise exem-

plary life, though he deeply felt his barbarous treatment of his brave general, in first dishonouring his wife, and then exposing him to meet inevitable death in the fore-front of the hottest battle,—yet, in praying to be delivered from this "blood-guiltiness," he bequeathed an important lesson to posterity, when, in his lowly prostration at the throne of God, his first cry was, "Against *Thee, Thee* only, have I sinned, and done this evil in *Thy* sight," plainly declaring, that all sin is, in the first instance, a sin against God.

While the most worldly are ready enough to exclaim against notorious sins, or against any sins carried to the greatest excess, to smaller offences they contrive to be tolerably reconciled. They think the commission of these not inconsistent with the profitable use of prayer in their formal way of using this customary exercise.

They are also sufficiently lenient to certain degrees of great sins; and various are the modifications and distinctions in their logic, and not over-correct the gradations in their moral scale of degrees. They do not consider that it is the extirpation, and not merely the reduction, of any sin, which is to procure them that peace and comfort for which they sometimes pray, and which they wonder they do not receive as an answer to their prayers.

They forget that the evil of sin is not to be measured by its magnitude only, but by the

spirit of disobedience which it indicates towards a generous Father, — a Father whose commands are all founded in mercy and love, and who considers every voluntary fault as no light offence when committed against supreme power, exercised with perfect tenderness.

But it is their reluctance to part with the remaining degrees, their wish to retain these modified sins; it is their favourite reserves to which they still cling, that prevent that peace which is promised to the victory, I had almost said to the omnipotence, of prayer.

For it is not so much the nicely-measured quantity as the nature of sin which constitutes its malignity, and obstructs the benefit of prayer. The inferior degree which is cherished, will, without earnest supplication to God, be ready to become the excess which is deprecated, whenever the appropriate temptation shall present itself. For, however our compassionate Father may pardon the unpremeditated fault, yet how can we expect Him to forgive any degree of sin that is allowed, that is even, in a certain measure, intended to be committed? Diminution, however, is a favourable step, if, by perseverence in prayer, it lead gradually to extirpation. And this naturally leads to the important subject of Perseverance in Prayer.

Prayer is an act which seems to be so prepared in the frame of our nature, to be so congenial to our dependent condition, so suited to

our exigencies, so adapted to every man's known wants, and to his possibilities of wants unknown, so full of relief to the soul, and of peace to the mind, and of gladness to the heart; so productive of confidence in God, and so reciprocally proceeding from that confidence, that we should think, if we did not know the contrary, that it is a duty which scarcely required to be enjoined: — that he who had once found out his necessities, and that there was no other redress for them, would spontaneously have recourse, as a delight, to what he had neglected as a command; that he who had once tasted the bounties of God, would think it a hardship not to be allowed to thank him for them; that the invitation to pray to his Benefactor, was an additional proof of Divine goodness; that to be allowed to praise him for his mercies, was itself a mercy.

The apostle's precept, "Pray always," — pray evermore, pray without ceasing, men ought always to pray, — will not be criticised as a pleonasm, if we call to remembrance that there is no state of mind, no condition of life, in which prayer is not a necessity as well as an obligation. In danger, fear impels to it; in trouble, we have no other resource; in sickness, we have no other refuge; in dejection, no other hope; in death, no other comfort.

Saint Paul frequently shows the word *prayer* to be a term of great latitude, involving the whole compass of our intercourse with God:

He represents it to include our adoration of his perfections, our acknowledgment of the wisdom of his dispensations, our obligation for his benefits providential and spiritual; the avowal of our entire dependence on Him, our absolute subjection to Him, the declaration of our faith in Him, the expression of our devotedness to Him; the confession of our own unworthiness, infirmities, and sins; the petition for the supply of our wants, and for the pardon of our offences; for succour in our distress; for a blessing on our undertakings; for the direction of our conduct, and the success of our affairs.

If any should be disposed to think this general view too comprehensive, let him point out which of these particulars prayer does not embrace; which of these clauses a rational, a sentient, an enlightened, a dependent being can omit in his scheme of devotion.

But, as the multifarious concerns of human life will necessarily occasion a suspension of the exercise, the Apostle, ever attentive to the principle of the act, and to the circumstances of the actor, reduces all these qualities to their essence, when he resolves them into *the spirit* of supplication.

To pray incessantly, therefore, appears to be, in his view of the subject, to keep the mind in an habitual disposition and propensity to devotion; for there is a sense in which we may be said to *do* that which we are *willing* to do,

though there are intervals of the thought as well as intermissions of the act; — "as a traveller," says Dr. Barrow, "may be said to be still on his journey, though he stops to take needful rest, and to transact necessary business." If he pause, he does not turn out of the way; his pursuit is not diverted, though occasionally interrupted, and unavoidably delayed.

Constantly maintaining the disposition, then, and never neglecting the actual duty; never slighting the occasion which presents itself, nor violating the habit of stated devotion, may, we presume, be called "to pray without ceasing." The expression "watching unto prayer" implies this vigilance in finding, and this zeal in laying hold on these occasions.

The success of prayer, though promised to all who offer it in perfect sincerity, is not so frequently promised to the cry of distress, to the impulse of fear, or the emergency of the moment, as to humble perseverance in devotion; it is to patient waiting, to assiduous solicitation, to unwearied importunity, that God has declared that He will lend His ear, that He will give the communication of His Spirit, that He will grant the return of our requests. Nothing but this holy perseverance can keep up in our minds an humble sense of our dependence. It is not by a mere casual petition, however passionate, but by habitual application, that devout affections are excited and maintained, that our

converse with heaven is carried on. It is by no other means that we can be assured, with Saint Paul, that "we are risen with Christ," but this obvious one, that we thus seek the things which are above; that the heart is renovated, that the mind is lifted above this low scene of things; that the spirit breathes in a purer atmosphere; that the whole man is enlightened, and strengthened, and purified; and that the more frequently, so the more nearly, he approaches to the throne of God. He will find also that prayer not only expresses but elicits the Divine grace.

Yet do we not allow every idle plea, every frivolous pretence, to divert us from our better resolves? Business brings in its grave apology, pleasure its bewitching excuse. But if we would examine our hearts truly, and report them faithfully, we should find the fact to be, that disinclination to this employment, oftener than our engagement in any other, keeps us from this sacred intercourse with our Maker.

Under circumstances of distress, or alarm, indeed, prayer is adopted with comparatively little reluctance; the mind which knows not where to fly, flies to God. In agony, nature is no atheist. The soul is drawn to God by a sort of natural impulse; not always, perhaps, by an emotion of piety, but from a feeling conviction, that every other refuge is "a refuge of lies." Oh! thou afflicted, tossed with tempests,

and not comforted, happy if thou art either drawn or driven, with holy David, to say to thy God, "Thou art a place to hide me in."

But if it is easy for the sorrowing heart to give up a world, by whom itself seems to be given up, there are other demands for prayer equally imperative. There are circumstances more dangerous, yet less suspected of danger, in which, though the call is louder, it is less heard; because the voice of conscience is drowned by the clamours of the world. Prosperous fortunes, unbroken health, flattering friends, buoyant spirits, a spring-tide of success, — these are the occasions when the very abundance of God's mercies is apt to fill the heart till it hardens it. Loaded with riches, crowned with dignities, successful in enterprise; beset with snares in the shape of honours, with perils under the mask of pleasures; then it is, that to the already saturated heart "to-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundant," is more in unison, than "what shall I render to the Lord?"

Prayer draws all the Christian graces into its focus. It draws Charity, followed by her lovely train, her forbearance with faults, her forgiveness of injuries, her pity for errors, her compassion for want. It draws Repentance,, with her holy sorrows, her pious resolutions, her self-distrust. It attracts Faith, with her elevated eye, — Hope, with her grasped anchor, — Beneficence, with her open hand, — Zeal, looking far and wide to serve, — Humility, with introverted eye, looking

at home. Prayer, by quickening these graces in the heart, warms them into life, fits them for service, and dismisses each to its appropriate practice. Cordial prayer is mental virtue; Christian virtue is spiritual action. The mould into which genuine prayer casts the soul is not effaced by the suspension of the act, but retains some touches of the impression till the act is repeated.

When we consider how profusely God bestows, and how little He requires; that while He confers like Deity, He desires only such poor returns as can be made by indigent, mendicant mortality; that He requires no costly oblation; nothing that will impoverish, but, on the contrary, will inconceivably enrich the giver. — When we consider this, we are ready to wonder that He will accept so poor a thing as impotent gratitude for immeasurable bounty. When we reflect, that our very desire to pray and to praise Him is His gift; — that His grace must purify the offering, before He condescends to receive it, must confer on it that spirit which renders it acceptable; — that He only expects we should consecrate to Him what we have received from Him; — that we should only confess, that of all we enjoy, nothing is our due; — we may well blush at our insensibility.

We think, perhaps, that had He commanded us "to do some great thing," to raise some monument of splendour, some memorial of no-

toriety and ostentation, something that would perpetuate our own name with His goodness, we should gladly have done it. How much more when He only requires

"Our thanks how due!"

when He only asks the homage of the heart, the expression of *our* dependence, the recognition of *His* right!

But he to whom the duty of prayer is unknown, and by whom the privilege of prayer is unfelt; or he by whom it is neglected; or he who uses it for form and not from feeling, may probably say, Will this work, wearisome even if necessary, never know an end? Will there be no period when God will dispense with its regular exercise? Will there never be such an attainment of the end proposed, as that we may be allowed to discontinue the means?

To these interrogatories there is but one answer, an answer which shall be also made, by an appeal to the inquirer himself.

If there is any day in which we are quite certain that we shall meet with no trial from Providence, no temptation from the world, any day in which we shall be sure to have no wrong tempers excited in ourselves, no call to bear with those of others, no misfortune to encounter, and no need of Divine assistance to endure it, on that morning we may safely omit prayer.

If there is any evening in which we have re-

ceived no protection from God, and experienced no mercy at His hands; if we have not neglected a single opportunity of doing or receiving good; if we are quite certain that we have not once spoken unadvisedly with our lips, nor entertained one vain or idle thought in our heart; on that night we may safely omit to praise God, and to confess our own sinfulness; on that night we may safely omit humiliation and thanksgiving. To repeat the converse would be superfluous.

When we can conscientiously say, that religion has given a tone to our conduct, a law to our actions, a rule to our thoughts, a bridle to our tongue, a restraint to every wrong passion, a check to every evil temper, then some will say, We may safely be dismissed from the drudgery of prayer, it will then have answered all the ends which you so tiresomely recommend. So far from it, we really figure to ourselves, that if we could hope to hear of a human being brought to such perfection of discipline, it would unquestionably be found that this would be the very being who would continue most perseveringly in the practice of that devotion which had so materially contributed to bring his heart and mind into so desirable a state, who would most tremble to discontinue prayer, who would be most appalled at the thought of the condition into which such discontinuance would be likely to reduce him. Whatever others do, he will continue for ever

to " sing praises unto Thee, O Thou most Highest; he will continue to tell of Thy loving kindness early in the morning, and of Thy truth in the night-season."

It is true that while he considered religion as something nominal and ceremonial, rather than as a principle of spirit and of life, he felt nothing encouraging, nothing refreshing, nothing delightful in prayer. But since he began to feel it as the means of procuring the most substantial blessings to his heart, since he began to experience something of the realisation of the promises to his soul, in the performance of this exercise, he finds there is no employment so satisfactory; none that his mind can so little do without; none that so effectually raises him above the world; none that so opens his eyes to its empty shadows: none which can make him look with so much indifference on its lying vanities; none that can so powerfully defend him against the assaults of temptation, and the allurements of pleasure; none that can so sustain him under labour, so carry him through difficulties; none that can so quicken him in the practice of every virtue, and animate him in the discharge of every duty.

An additional reason why we should live in the perpetual use of prayer, seems to be, that our blessed Redeemer, after having given both the example and the command, while on earth, condescends still to be our unceasing intercessor

in heaven. Can we ever cease petitioning for ourselves, when we believe that He never ceases interceding for us?

If we are so unhappy as now to find little pleasure in this holy exercise, that, however, is so far from being a reason for discontinuing it, that it affords the strongest argument for perseverance. That which was at first a form, will become a pleasure; that which was a burden, will become a privilege; that which we impose upon ourselves as a medicine, will become necessary as an aliment, and desirable as a gratification. That which is now short and superficial, will become copious and solid. The chariot-wheel is warmed by its own motion. Use will make that easy which was at first painful. That which is once become easy will soon be rendered pleasant. Instead of repining at the performance, we shall be unhappy at the omission. When a man recovering from sickness attempts to walk, he does not discontinue the exercise because he feels himself weak, nor even because the effort is painful. He rather redoubles his exertion; it is from his perseverance that he looks for strength. An additional turn every day diminishes his repugnance, augments his vigour, improves his spirits. That effort which was submitted to because it was salutary, is continued because the feeling of renovated strength renders it delightful.

But if prayer be so exhilarating to the soul,

what shall be said of praise? Praise is the only employment, we had almost said it is the only duty, in which self finds no part. In praise we go out of ourselves, and think only of Him to whom we offer it. It is the most purely disinterested of all services. It is gratitude without solicitation, acknowledgment without petition. Prayer is the overflowing expression of our wants; praise of our affection. Prayer is the language of the destitute; praise of the redeemed sinner. If the angelic spirits offer their praises exempt from our mixture of infirmity or alloy, yet we have a motive for gratitude, unknown even to the angels. They are unfallen beings; they cannot say as we can, "Worthy the Lamb, for He was slain for us." Prayer is the child of Faith; praise of love. Prayer is prospective; praise takes in, in its wide range, enjoyment of present, remembrance of past, and anticipation of future, blessings. Prayer points the only way to heaven; praise is already there.

CHAP. XII.

ON INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

As it is the effect of prayer to *expand* the affections as well as to *sanctify* them, the benevolent Christian is not satisfied to commend himself alone to the Divine favour. The heart which is full of the love of God will overflow with love to his neighbour. All that are near to himself he wishes to bring near to God. He will present the whole human race as objects of the Divine compassion, but especially the faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Religion makes a man so liberal of soul, that he cannot endure to restrict any thing, much less Divine mercies, to himself; he, therefore, spiritualises the social affections, by adding intercessory to personal prayer: for he knows that petitioning for others is one of the best methods of exercising and enlarging our own love and charity, even if it were not to draw down those blessings which are promised to those for whom we ask them.

It is unnecessary to produce any of the numberless instances with which Scripture abounds, on the efficacy of intercession: in which God has proved the truth of his own assurance, that

" his ear was open to their cry." I shall confine myself to a few observations on the benefits it brings to him who offers it. When we pray for the objects of our dearest regard, it purifies passion, and exalts love into religion: when we pray for those with whom we have worldly intercourse, it smooths down the swellings of envy, and bids the tumults of anger and ambition subside: when we pray for our country, it sanctifies patriotism: when we pray for those in authority, it adds a Divine motive to human obedience: when we pray for our enemies, it softens the savageness of war, and mollifies hatred into tenderness, and resentment into sorrow. There is no such softener of animosity, no such soother of resentment, no such allayer of hatred, as sincere cordial prayer. And we can only learn the duty, so difficult to human nature, of forgiving those who have offended us, when we bring ourselves to pray for them to Him whom we ourselves daily offend. When those who are the faithful followers of the same Divine Master pray for each other, the reciprocal intercession delightfully realises that beautiful idea of " the communion of Saints." There is scarcely any thing which more enriches the Christian than the circulation of this holy commerce; than the comfort of believing, while he is praying for his Christian friends, that he is also reaping the benefit of their prayers for him.

Some are for confining their intercessions only to the good, as if none but persons of merit were entitled to our prayers. Good! who is good? "There is none good but one, that is God." Merit! who has it? Desert! who can plead it? in the sight of God, I mean. Who shall bring his own piety, or the piety of others, in the way of *claim*, before a Being of such transcendent holiness, that "the heavens are not clean in his sight?" And if we wait for perfect holiness as a preliminary to prayer, when shall such erring creatures pray *at all* to HIM "who chargeth the angels with folly?"

The social affections were given us, not only for the kindliest, but the noblest, purposes. The charities of father, son, and brother were bestowed, not only to make life pleasant, but to make it useful; not only that we might contribute to the present comfort, but to the eternal benefit, of each other.

These heaven-implanted affections are never brought into exercise more properly, nor with more lively feelings, than in intercessory prayer. Our friends may have wants which we cannot remove, desires which we cannot gratify, afflictions which we cannot relieve, but it is always in our power to bring them before God; to pray for them whenever we pray for ourselves. This, as it is a most pleasant and easy, so it is an indispensable, obligation. It is a duty which brings the social affections into their highest

exercise, and which may be reciprocally paid and received.

The same Scriptures which expressly enjoin that supplication, prayers, intercession, and giving of thanks, be made for all men, furnish also numerous examples of the efficacy of intercessory prayer. We need not dwell on the instance of the rain obtained by the prayers of Elijah, or the earlier availing intercessions of Moses, with other public deliverances effected in the same manner.

Though the perseverance of Abraham's prayer did not prevent the extermination of the polluted city, yet, doubtless, the blessing he solicited for it returned into his own bosom, and the successive promises made by the Almighty Judge to the successively reduced number of the righteous, for whose sake the petition for preservation was offered, affords a proof of the Divine approbation, and a striking encouragement to persist in the duty of intercessory prayer. The promise of God was not withdrawn. The prayer was conditional, and could the petitioner have made up his very lowest complement, the city had been saved. The interceding heart in any event is sure to gain something for itself.

Prayer is such an enlarger of the affections, such an opener of the heart, that we cannot but wonder how any who live in the practice of it should be penurious in their alms; or if they do give, should do it "grudgingly, or of neces-

sity." Surely, if our prayer be cordial, we shall be more ready to assist as well as to love those for whom we are in the habit of making supplication to God. It is impossible to pray sincerely for the well-being of others, without being desirous of contributing to it. We can hardly conceive a more complete species of self-deception than that practised by an avaricious professor of religion, one who goes on mechanically to pray for the poor, whilst his prayer has neither opened his heart nor his purse. He may value himself on this, as on other instances of his ingenuity, in having found out so cheap a way of doing good, and go on contentedly, till he hears that tremendous sentence of exclusion, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

> "O impudence of Wealth! with all thy store,
> How darest thou let one worthy man be poor?"

O you great ones of the earth, whom riches ensnare and prosperity betrays, be largely liberal, even from self-interest. Not, indeed, expecting to make the liberality you bestow a remuneration for the devotions you withhold. Scatter your superfluities, and more than your superfluities, to the destitute, if not to vindicate Providence, yet to benefit yourselves. Not, indeed, to revive the old pious fraud of depending for salvation on the prayers of others; yet still you may hope to be repaid, with usurious in-

terest, from the pious poor, by the very tender charity of their prayers for you. Their supplications may possibly be so heard, that you may, at length, be brought to the indispensable necessity, and the bounden duty, of praying for yourselves.

There is a generosity in religion. The same principle which disposes a Christian to contribute to the temporal interests of those he loves, inclines him to breathe his earnest supplication for their spiritual benefit. Not only does prayer for others promote natural affection, not only does it soften the heart of him who intercedes, but it is hoped that they for whom the intercession is made may reap the benefit.

But our intercessions must dwell neither in generalities for the public, nor in limitations to the wants of our particular friends. The Christian is the friend of every description of the children of mortality. In the fulness of our compassion for the miseries of mankind, we pour out our hearts in prayer for the poor and destitute, and we do well. But there is another and a large class who are still more the objects of our pity, and, consequently, should be of our prayers. While we pray for those who have no portion in this world, do we not sometimes forget to pray for those who have their whole portion in it? We pray for the praying servants of God, but perhaps we neglect to pray for those who never pray for themselves. These are the

persons who stand most in need of the mercy of the Almighty, and of our Christian importunity in their favour.

Is it not affecting, that even into our devotions we are disposed to carry the regard we too highly indulge for the good things of this life, by earnestly imploring mercy upon those who want them; and by forgetting to offer our supplications in favour of those who are blinded by the too full enjoyment of them? If the one duty be done, should the other be left undone?

If we want an example of the most sublime kind of charity, observe for what it is that the great Apostle of the Gentiles "bows his knees to God" in behalf of his friends. Is it for an increase of their wealth, their power, their fame, or any other external prosperity?—No: it is that "God would grant them according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might in the inner man;"—it is, that "Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith;"—it is, "that they may be rooted and grounded in love," and this to a glorious end,—"that they may be able, with all saints, to comprehend" the vast dimensions of the love of Christ;—that "they may be filled with all the fulness of God." These are the sort of petitions which we need never hesitate to present. These are requests which we may rest assured are always agreeable to the Divine will; here we are

certain we cannot "pray amiss." These are intercessions of which the benefit may be felt, when wealth, and fame, and power shall be forgotten things.

Why does Saint Paul "pray day and night that he might see the face of his Thessalonian converts?" Not merely that he might have the gratification of once more beholding those he loved, — though that would sensibly delight so affectionate a heart, — but "that he might perfect that which was lacking in their faith."

These are instances of a spirit so large in its affections, so high in its object; of a man who had so much of Heaven in his friendships, so much of soul in his attachments, that he thought time too brief, earth too scanty, worldly blessings too low, to enter deeply into his petitions for those to whom time and earth, the transitory blessings of life, and life itself, would so soon be no more.

In exciting us to perpetual gratitude, the same apostle stirs us up to the duty of keeping before our eyes the mercies which so peremptorily demand it. These mercies succeed each other so rapidly, or, rather, are crowded upon us so simultaneously, that if we do not count them as they are received, and record them as they are enjoyed, their very multitude, which ought to penetrate the heart more deeply, will cause them to slip out of the memory.

As to the commanded duty of praying for our enemies, the most powerful example bequeathed to us in Scripture, next to that of his Divine Master on the cross, is that of St. Stephen. Even *after* the expiring martyr had ejaculated, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Let every instance of Roman greatness of mind, let every story of Grecian magnanimity be ransacked, and produce, who can, such another example. Theirs is tumour, this is grandeur; theirs is heroism, this is Christianity; they implored the gods for themselves, Stephen for his murderers.

In closing the subject of Intercessory Prayer, may the author be allowed to avail herself of the feeling it suggests to her own heart? and, while she earnestly implores that Being who can make the meanest of His creatures instrumental to His glory, to bless this humble attempt to the reader, may she, without presumption, entreat that this work of Christian charity may be reciprocal, and that those who peruse these pages may put up a petition for her, that, in the great day to which we are all hastening, and to which she is so very near, she may not be found to have suggested to others what she herself did not believe, or to have recommended what she did not desire to practise? In that

awful day of everlasting decision, may both the reader and the writer be pardoned and accepted, "not for any works of righteousness which they have done," but through the merits of the GREAT INTERCESSOR.

CHAP. XIII.

THE PRACTICAL RESULTS OF PRAYER EXHIBITED IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD.

As the keeping up a due sense of religion, both in faith and practice, so materially depends on the habit of fervent and heart-felt devotion, may we be permitted, in this place, to insist on the probable effects which would follow the devout, habitual, and conscientious exercise of prayer, rather than on prayer itself?

As soon as religion is really become the earnest desire of our hearts, it will inevitably become the great business of our lives; the one is the only satisfactory evidence of the other: consequently, the religion of the heart and life will promote that spirit of prayer by which both have been excited and promoted.

They, therefore, little advance the true interests of mankind, who, under the powerful plea of what great things God has done for us, in our redemption by His Son, neglect to encourage our active services in His cause. Hear the words of inspiration, "Be not slothful"—"run the race"—"fight the good fight"—"strive to enter in"—"give diligence"—"work out your own salvation"—"God is not un-

mindful to forget your labour of love"— "but when you have done all, ye are unprofitable servants, ye have done that which was your duty to do."

But if, after we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, what shall we be if we have done nothing? Is it not obvious that the Holy Spirit, who dictated these exhortations, clearly meant that a sound faith in the word of God was intended to produce holy exertion for the advancement of His glory? The activity in doing good of the Son of God was not exceeded by his devotion, and both powerfully illustrated his doctrines, and confirmed his divinity. Until, then, we make our religion a part of our common life, until we bring Christianity, as an illustrious genius is said to have brought philosophy, from its retreat to live in the world, and dwell among men; until we have brought it from the closet to the active scene, from the church to the world, whether that world be the court, the sénate, the exchange, the public office, the private counting-house, the courts of justice, the professional departments, or the domestic drawing-room, it will not have fully accomplished what it was sent on earth to do.

We do not mean the introduction of its language, but of its spirit: the former is frequently as incompatible with public, as it is unsuitable to private business; but the latter is of universal application. We mean that the temper and dis-

positions which it is the object of prayer to communicate, should be kept alive in society, and brought into action in its affairs; that the integrity, the veracity, the justice, the purity, the liberality, the watchfulness over ourselves, the candour towards others, all exercised in the fear of the Lord, and strengthened by the word of God and prayer, should be brought from the retirement of devotion to the regulation of the conduct.

There may be a form of unfelt petitions, a ceremonious avowal of faith, a customary profession of repentance, a general acknowledgment of sin, uttered from the lips to God; but where is His image and superscription written upon the heart? Where is the transforming power of religion in the life? Where is the living transcript of the Divine original? Where is that holiness to which the vision of the Lord is specifically promised? Where is the light, and life, and grace of the Redeemer exhibited in the temper and conduct? Yet we are assured, that if we are Christians, there must be a constant aim at this conformity.

We should, therefore, endeavour to believe as we pray, to think as we pray, to feel as we pray, and to act as we pray. Prayer must not be a solitary, independent exercise; but an exercise incorporated with many others, and inseparably connected with that golden chain of Christian duties, of which, when so connected,

it forms one of the most important links. *They* will not *pray* differently from the rest of the world, who do not *live* differently.

But though we must not, in accommodation to the prevailing prejudices and unnecessary zeal against abstinence and devotion, neglect the imperative duties of retirement, prayer, and meditation; yet, perhaps, as prayer makes so indispensable an article in the Christian life, some retired, contemplative persons may apprehend that it makes the whole; whereas prayer is only the operation which sets the machine going. It is the sharpest spur to virtuous action, but not the act itself; the only infallible incentive to a useful life, but not a substitute for that usefulness. Religion keeps her children in full employment; it finds them work for every day in the week, as well as on Sundays.

The praying Christian, on going into the world, feels that his social and religious duties are happily comprised in one brief sentence — "I will *think* upon thy commandments to *do* them." What the Holy Spirit has so indissolubly joined, he does not separate.

As the lawyer has his compendium of cases and precedents; the legislator his statutes; the soldier his book of tactics; and every other professor his *vade mecum* to consult in difficulties; the Christian, to whichever of the professions he may belong, will take his morning lecture

from a more infallible directory, comprehending not only cases and precedents, but abounding with those seminal principles which contain the essence of all actual duty, from which all practical excellence is deducible. This spirit of laws differs from all other legal institutes, some of which, from that imperfection inseparable from the best human things, have been found unintelligible, some impracticable, and some have become obsolete. The Divine law is subject to no such disadvantages: it is perfect in its nature, intelligible in its construction, and eternal in its obligation.

This sacred institute he will consult in the spirit of Prayer, not occasionally, but daily. Unreminded of general duty, unfurnished with some leading hint for the particular demand, he will not venture to rush into the bustle, trial, and temptation of the day. Of this aid he will possess himself, with the more ease, and less loss of time, as he will not have to ransack a multiplicity of folios for a detached case, or an individual intricacy; for, though he may not find in the Bible specific instances, yet he will discover in every page some governing truth, some rule of universal application, the spirit of which may be brought to bear on almost every circumstance; some principle suited to every purpose, and competent to the solution of every moral difficulty.

Scripture does not, indeed, pretend to include

technical or professional peculiarities, but it exhibits the temper and the conduct which may be made applicable to the special concerns of every man, whatever be his occupation. He will find in it the right direction to the right pursuit; the straight road to the proper end; the duty of a pure intention; and the prohibition of false measures to attain even a laudable object. No hurry or engagement will ever make him lose sight of that sacred aphorism so pointedly addressed to men of business, "He that *maketh haste* to be rich shall hardly be innocent." The cautionary texts which he admired in his closet, he will not treasure up as classical mottoes to amuse his fancy, or embellish his discourse; but will adopt as rules of conduct, and bring them into every worldly transaction, whether commercial, forensic, medical, military, or whatever else be his professed object. He will not adjust his scale of duty by the false standard of the world, nor by any measure of his own devising: he has but one standard of judging, but one measure of conduct, — the infallible Word of God. This rule he will take as he finds it, he will use as he is commanded; he will not bend it to his own convenience; he will not accommodate it to his own views, his own passions, his own emolument, his own reputation.

He whose heart has been set in motion by Prayer; who has had his spiritual pulse quick-

ened by a serious perusal of the Holy Scriptures; will find his work growing upon him in regular proportion to his willingness to do it. He is diligently exact in the immediate duties of the passing day. Though procrastination is treated by many as a light evil, he studiously avoids it, because he has felt its mischiefs; he is active even from the love of ease, for he knows that the duties which would have cost him little, if done on the day they were due, may, by the accumulation of many neglected days, cost him much. The fear of this rouses him to immediate exertion. If the case in question be doubtful, he deliberates, he enquires, he prays; if it be clear and pressing, what his hand finds to do, he does with all his might; and in the calls of distress, he always acts on his favourite aphorism, — that giving soon is giving twice.

Abroad how many duties meet him! He has on his hands the poor who want bread, the afflicted who want comfort, the distressed who want counsel, the ignorant who want teaching, the depressed who want soothing. At home he has his family to watch over. He has to give instruction to his children, and an example to his servants. But his more immediate, as well as more difficult work is with himself; and he knows that this exercise, well performed, can alone enable him wisely to perform the rest. Here he finds work for every faculty of his

understanding, every conquest over his will, for every affection of his heart. Here his spirit truly labours. He prays fervently; but he has to watch, as well as to pray, that his conscience be not darkened by prejudice; that his bad qualities do not assume the shape of virtues, nor his good ones engender self-applause; that his best intentions do not mislead his judgment; that his candour do not degenerate into indifference, nor his strictness into bigotry; that his moderation do not freeze, nor his zeal burn. He has to control his impatience at the defeat of his most wisely-conceived plans. He will find, that in his best services there is something that is wrong, much that is wanting; and he feels, that whatever in them is right, is not his own, but the gift of God.

Is your Christian, then, perfect? you will perhaps ask. Ask himself. With deep and sincere self-abasement he will answer in the negative. He will not only confess more failings than even his accusers ascribe to him, but he will own what they do not always charge him with, — sins. He will acknowledge that there is no natural difference between himself and his censurer, but that, through Divine grace, the one prays and struggles against those corruptions, the very existence of which the other does not suspect.

There is nothing more humbling to the confirmed praying Christian than that, whilst in

his happier moments he is able to figure to himself a cheering image of the glory of the Redeemer, the blessedness of the redeemed, the beauty of Christian perfection, to feel himself not only awakened, but exalted; not merely enlightened, but kindled; almost possessing, rather than anticipating Heaven; — while he is enabled, in a joyful measure, to meditate upon these things, to feel his mind ennobled, and his soul expanded by the contemplation, yet to find how soon the bright ideas fade, the strong impression is effaced, the heavenly vision vanished. He mourns to reflect, that he does not more abidingly possess in his heart, that he does not more powerfully exhibit in his conversation, more forcibly display in his life, that spirit of which his mind has been sometimes so full, his heart so enamoured, when prostrate before his Maker.

To his grief he finds that his most perfect obedience is incomplete, that his warmest affections are often languid; his best intentions perhaps not realised, his best resolves not followed up. In this view, though he is abased in dust and ashes in looking up to God, as the fountain of perfection, he is cheered in looking up to him also as the fountain of mercy in Christ Jesus. He prays as well as strives, that the knowledge of his own faults may make him more humble, and his sense of the Divine mercies more grateful.

But he will feel that his faith, even though it does not want sincerity, will too frequently want

energy. He has, therefore, to watch against cold and heartless prayer; though, perhaps, the humility arising from this consciousness is a benefit in another way. He feels it difficult to bring every "thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ;" yet he goes on cheerily, willing to believe that what may be difficult is not impossible. He has to struggle against over-anxiety for temporal things; he has to preserve simplicity of intention, consistency, and perseverance; he has, in short, to watch against a long list of sins, errors, and temptations, which he will find heavier in weight, and more in number, the more closely he looks into his catalogue.

The praying Christian in the world has, above all, to watch against the fear of man, as he may find it more easy to endure the cross than to despise the shame. Even if he have in a good degree conquered this temptation, he may still find a more dangerous enemy in the applause of the world than he found in its enmity. An eager desire of popularity is, perhaps, the last lingering sin, which cleaves even to those who have made a considerable progress in religion; the still unextinguished passion of a mind great enough to have subdued many other passions.

The devout Christian endeavours to exemplify the emphatical description of the translated Saint in the Old Testament, — "he *walks* with God." He does not merely bow down before His footstool at stated intervals; he does not

ceremoniously address Him on great occasions only, and then retreat, and dwell at a distance; but he *walks* with Him: his habitual intercourse, his natural motion, his daily converse, his intimate communication, is with his Redeemer. He is still seeking, though it may be with slow and faltering steps, the things which are above; he is still striving, though with unequal progress, for the prize of his high calling; he is still looking, though with a dim and feeble eye, for glory, honour, and immortality; he is still waiting, though not with a trust so lively as to annihilate the distance, to see his eternal redemption drawing nigh. Though his aims will always be far greater than his attainments, yet he is not discouraged. His hope is above, his heart is above, his treasure is above: no wonder, then, that his prayers are directed, and a large portion of his wealth sent forward thither, where he himself hopes soon to be. It is but transmitting his riches of both kinds, not only to his future, but his everlasting home.

The grand danger of the Christian in the world is *from* the world. He is afraid of the sleek, smooth, insinuating, and not discreditable vices; he guards against self-complacency. If his affairs prosper, and his reputation stands high, he betakes himself to his only sure refuge, the throne of God; to his only sure remedy, humble prayer. He knows it is more easy to perform a hundred right deeds, and to keep

many virtues in exercise, than "to keep himself unspotted from the world," than to hold the things of the world with a loose hand. Even his best actions, which may bring him most credit, have their dangers: they make him fear that "while he has a name to live, he is dead."

He feels that if he had no sin but vanity, the consciousness of that alone would be sufficient to set him on his guard, to quicken him in prayer, to caution him in conduct. He does not fear vanity as he fears any other individual vice, as a single enemy, against which he is to be on the watch, but as that vice which, if indulged, would poison all his virtues. Among the sins of the inner man, he knows that "this kind goeth not out but by prayer." When he hears it said of any popular, and especially of any religious, character, "He is a good man, but he is vain," he says within himself, "He is is vain, and therefore I fear he is not a good man." How many right qualities does vanity rob of their value — how many right actions of their reward!

Every suspicion of the first stirring of vanity in himself sends him with deeper prostration before his Maker. Lord, what is man! Shall the praise of a fellow-creature, whose breath is in his nostrils, whose ashes must soon be mingled with my own, which may even before my own be consigned to kindred dust, shall *his* praise be of sufficient potency to endanger the humility of

a being, who is not only looking forward to the applause of those glorious spirits which surround the throne of God, but to the approbation of God himself?

When those with whom he occasionally mixes see the praying Christian calm and cheerful in society, they little suspect the frequent struggles, the secret conflicts, he has within. Others see his devout and conscientious life, but he alone knows the plague of his own heart. If he has a conflict with the world, he has a harder conflict with sin. His bosom foe is his most unyielding enemy. This, therefore, it is which makes his other trials heavy, which makes his power of sustaining them weak, which renders his conquest over them slow and inconclusive; which too often solicits him to oppose interest to duty, indolence to resistance, and self-indulgence to victory.

But instead of fighting with a foreign enemy, he turns his arms against himself. The foe he combats is his own heart. No *earthly* warrior, when his commission is made out, ever found in it so formidable a clause as that which makes a leading sentence in the *Christian's* articles of war. To storm a fort, to mount a breach, is easy compared with the statute, "If any man come after me, *let him deny himself.*" For this plague of an evil heart he seeks the only remedy: to prayer, that balm of hurt minds, he constantly repairs.

The confirmed Christian will, above all, labour most assiduously after that *consistency of character*, which is a more unequivocal evidence of high Christian attainment than the most prominent great qualities, which are frequently counteracted by their opposites. This consistency exhibits a more striking conformity to the image of his Maker; as in the works of creation, the wisdom of the Supreme Intelligence is more admirable in the agreement and harmony of one thing with another than in the individual beauty and excellence of each. It is more conspicuous in the fitness and proportion of its parts relatively, than in the composition of the parts themselves. By this uniformity, the results of religion are the most beautifully exhibited in the Christian character.

When we reflect on the conflicts and the trials of the conscientious, watchful, praying Christian, we shall estimate aright the value of the consoling promises of the Gospel. It is by these promises, applied through Divine grace to the heart, that the Christian is gradually brought to consider Prayer, not merely as a duty, but to value it as a privilege; and the more earnestly he cultivates this spirit of supplication, the more deeply will it enable him to penetrate into the recesses of his own heart. The more he discovers the evils which he there finds, he will be so far from being deterred by the discovery from approaching to the fountain of mercy, that it

will lead him to be more diligent, as well as more fervent in his application there. Nothing so faithfully reveals to us our spiritual exigencies, nothing can quicken our petitions for their relief so powerfully, as the conviction of their actual existence. In this conviction, in this earnest application, the Christian at length feels the efficacy of Prayer in its consolations, its blessedness, its transforming power.

CHAP. XIV.

THE CONSOLATIONS OF PRAYER IN AFFLICTION, SICKNESS, AND DEATH.

THE pagan philosophers have given many admirable precepts, both for resigning blessings and for sustaining misfortunes! but, wanting the motives and sanctions of Christianity, though they excite much intellectual admiration, they produce little practical effect. The stars which glittered in their moral night, though bright, imparted no warmth. Their most beautiful dissertations on death had no charm to extract its sting. We receive no support from their most elaborate treatises on immortality, for want of Him who "brought life and immortality to light." Their consolatory discussions could not strip the grave of its terrors; for to them it was not "swallowed up in victory." To conceive of the soul as an immortal principle, without proposing a scheme for the pardon of its sins, was but cold consolation. Their future state was but a happy guess: their heaven but a fortunate *conjecture*.

When we peruse their finest compositions, we admire the manner in which the medicine is administered, but we do not find it effectual for

he cure, nor even for the mitigation of our disease. The beauty of the sentiment we applaud, but our heart continues to ache.

To this cold scepticism let us oppose the heart-consoling, exhilarating, triumphant *certainties* of Christianity. "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. — In my flesh I shall see God, whom mine eyes shall behold and not another." — "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." — Here is the true balm of Gilead, — here is the healing cordial for every human woe!

The hair-splitting casuist does not directly say that pain is not an evil, but by a sophistical turn professes that philosophy will never *confess* it to be an evil. But what consolation does the sufferer draw from this quibbling nicety?

Christianity knows none of these fanciful distinctions. She never pretends to insist that pain is not an evil, but she does more; she converts it into a good. Christianity, therefore, teaches a fortitude as much more noble than philosophy, as meeting pain with resignation to the hand that inflicts it is more heroic than denying it to be an evil.

"I will be sanctified in them that draw nigh unto me," says the Almighty, by his prophet. We must, therefore, when we approach him in our devotions, frequently endeavour to warm our

hearts, raise our views, and quicken our aspirations, with a recollection of His glorious attributes, — of that omnipotence which can give to all without the least deduction from any, or from Himself; of that ubiquity which renders Him the constant witness of our actions; of that omniscience which makes Him a discerner of our intentions, and which penetrates the most secret disguises of our inmost souls; of that perfect holiness which should at once be the object of our adoration and the model of our practice; of that truth which will never forfeit any of His promises; of that faithfulness which will never forsake any that trust in Him; of that love which our innumerable offences cannot exhaust; of that eternity which had place "before the mountains were brought forth;" of that grandeur which has set His glory above the heavens; of that long-suffering of God, who is strong and patient, and who is provoked every day; of that justice which will by no means clear the guilty, yet of that mercy which forgiveth iniquity, transgression, and sin; of that compasssion which *waits* to be gracious; of that goodness which *leadeth* to repentance; of that purity which, while it hates sin, invites the sinner to return.

In seasons of distress and trial, whether from the loss of health, or under whatever other afflictive dispensation he may be struggling, the Christian will endeavour to draw consolation, by reviewing the mercies of his past life, and

anticipating the glorious promises of the life to come. If previously accustomed to unbroken health, he will bless God for the long period in which he has enjoyed it. If continued infirmity have been his portion, he will feel grateful that he has had such a long and gradual weaning from the world. From either state he will extract consolation. If pain be new, what a mercy to have hitherto escaped it! If habitual, we bear more easily what we have borne long.

He will review his temporal blessings and deliverances; his domestic comforts, his Christian friendships. Among his mercies, his now "purged eyes" will reckon his difficulties, his sorrows, and his trials. A new and heavenly light will be thrown on that passage, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." It seems to him as if hitherto he had only heard it with the hearing of his ear, but now "his eye seeth it." If he be a real Christian, and has had enemies, he will always have prayed for them; but now he will be thankful for them. He will the more earnestly implore mercy for them, as instruments which have helped to fit him for his present state. He will look up with holy gratitude to the Great Physician, who, by a Divine chemistry, in mixing up events, has made that one unpalatable ingredient, at the bitterness of which he once revolted, the very means by which all other things have worked

together for good: had they worked separately, they would not have worked efficaciously.

If our souls have been truly "sanctified by the word of God and Prayer," we shall, under the sharpest trials, be apt to compare our own sufferings with the cup which our Redeemer drank for our sakes; drank to avert the Divine displeasure from us. Let us pursue the comparative view of our condition with that of the Son of God. *He* was deserted in His most trying hour, deserted, probably, by those whose limbs, sight, life, He had restored; whose souls He had come to save. *We* are surrounded by unwearied friends; every pain is mitigated by sympathy; every want not only relieved, but prevented: the "asking eye" explored; the inarticulate sound interpreted; the ill-expressed wish anticipated; the but suspected want supplied. When *our* souls are "exceeding sorrowful," *our* friends participate our sorrow; when desired to "watch" with us, they watch not "*one* hour," but *many*; not "falling asleep," but both flesh and spirit ready and willing; not forsaking us in our "agony," but sympathising where they cannot relieve.

The night also will be made to the praying Christian a season of heart-searching thought, and spiritual consolation. Solitude and stillness completely shut out the world, its business, its cares, its impertinences. The mind is sobered, the passions are stilled: it seems to the watchful

Christian, as if there were in the universe only God and his own soul. It is an inexpressible consolation to him to feel that the one Being in the universe, who never slumbereth nor sleepeth, is the very Being to whom he has free access, even in the most unseasonable hours. The faculties of the mind may not, perhaps, be in their highest exercise; but the affections of the heart, from the exclusion of distracting objects, more readily ascend to their *noblest* object. Night and darkness are no parasites: conscience is more easily alarmed. It puts on fewer disguises. We appear to ourselves more what we really are. This detection is salutary. The glare which the cheerful daylight, business, pleasure, and company, had shed over all objects, is withdrawn. Schemes, which in the day had appeared plausible, now present objections. What had then appeared safe, now, at least, seems to require deliberation. This silent season of self-examination is a keen detector of any latent sin, which, like the fly in the box of perfume, may corrupt much that is pure.

When this communion with God can be maintained, it supplies deficiencies of devotion to those who have little leisure during the day; and by thus rescuing these otherwise lost hours, it snatches time from oblivion, at once adds to the length of life, and weans from the love of it.

If the wearied and restless body be tempted

to exclaim, "Would God it were morning!" the very term suggests the most consoling of all images. The quickened mind shoots forward beyond this vale of tears, beyond the dark valley of the shadow of death; it stretches onward to the joyful morning of the resurrection; it anticipates that blessed state where there is no more weeping and no more night; no weeping, for God's own hand shall wipe away the tears; no night, for the Lamb himself shall be the light.

If humbling doubts of his own state depress the real penitent, what comfort may he not derive from the assurance, that the acceptable sacrifice to the God of love is the troubled spirit, and the broken and contrite heart?

It is a further encouragement to Prayer to the dejected spirit, that the Almighty was not contented to show his willingness to pardon by single declarations, however strong and full. He has heaped up words, he has crowded images, he has accumulated expressions, he has exhausted language, by all the variety of synonymes which express love, mercy, pardon, and acceptance. They are graciously crowded together, that the trembling mourner who was not sufficiently assured by one, might be encouraged by another. And it is the consummation of the Divine goodness, that this message is not sent by his ambassador, but that the King of kings, the blessed and only Potentate,

condescends himself to pronounce this royal proclamation, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin!" Forgiving, indeed, but, in consonance with his just demand of repentance and reformation, "who will by no means clear the guilty."

Refuse not, then, to take comfort from the promises of God, when, perhaps, you are easily satisfied with the assurance of pardon from a frail and sinful creature, like yourself, whom you had offended. Why is God the only being who is not believed? who is not trusted? "Oh, Thou that hearest Prayer, why unto Thee will not all flesh come?"

In the extremity of pain, the Christian feels there is no consolation but in humble acquiescence in the Divine will. It may be that he can pray but little, but that little will be fervent. He can articulate, perhaps, not at all, but his Prayer is addressed to one who sees the heart; who can interpret its language; who requires not words, but affections. A pang endured without a murmur, or only such an involuntary groan as nature extorts, and faith regrets, is itself a Prayer. We have a striking instance of an answer to silent Prayer in the case of Moses. In a situation of extreme distress, when he had not uttered a word, "the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy crying."

If, however, in the conduct of this nightly watching, and this nightly Prayer, our own stock of thought or expression be absolutely deficient, prophets and apostles will not only afford us the most encouraging examples, but the most profitable assistance. More especially the royal treasury of King David lies open to us; and whatever are our wants, there our resources are inexhaustible. The Psalms have supplied to all ages materials for Christian worship, under every supposable circumstance of human life. They have facilitated the means of negotiation for the penitent, and of gratitude for the pardoned. They have provided confession for the contrite, consolation for the broken-hearted, invitation to the weary, and rest for the heavy laden. They have furnished petitions for the needy, praise for the grateful, and adoration for all. However indigent in himself, no one can complain of want, who has access to such a magazine of intellectual and spiritual wealth. These variously-gifted compositions not only kindle the devoutest feelings, but suggest the aptest expressions: they invest the sublimest meanings with the noblest eloquence. They have taught the tongue of the stammerer to speak plainly; they have furnished him who was ready to perish for lack of knowledge with principles as well as feelings; they have provided the illiterate with the form, and the devout with the spirit of Prayer. To him

who previously felt not his wants, they have imparted fervent desires; they have inspired the faint with energy, and the natural dead with spiritual life.

The Psalms exhibit the finest specimen of experimental and devotional religion in the world. They are attended with this singular advantage, and this unspeakable comfort,— that in them God speaks to us, and we speak to Him. "Seek ye my face: Thy face, Lord, will I seek." This delightful interlocution between the King of saints and the penitent sinner; this interchange of character; this mixture of Prayer and promise; of help implored, and grace bestowed; of weakness pleaded, and strength imparted; of favour shown, and gratitude returned; of prostration on one part, and encouragement on the other; of abounding sorrow, and overflowing mercy: this beautiful variety of affecting intercourse between sinful dust and Infinite Goodness, lifts the abased penitent into the closest and most sublime communion with his Saviour and his God.

The royal poet in these noble compositions has given us the most elevated character of Prayer, by showing us that supplication is the dialect of the poor in spirit; thanksgiving, the idiom of the genuine Christian; praise, his vernacular tongue.

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How cheering under every species of distress

to reflect, that our blessed Redeemer not only suffered for us upon the cross, but is sympathising with us now! that "in all our afflictions He is afflicted." The tenderness of the sympathy seems to add a value to the sacrifice; while the vastness of the sacrifice endears the sympathy by ennobling it.

If the intellectual powers be mercifully preserved, how many virtues may be brought into exercise on a sick bed, which had either lain dormant, or been considered as of inferior worth in the prosperous day of activity. The Christian temper, indeed, seems to be that part of religion which is more peculiarly to be exercised under these circumstances. The passive virtues, the least brilliant, but the most difficult, are then particularly called into action. To *suffer* cheerfully the whole will of God on the tedious bed of languishing is more trying than to perform the most shining exploit on the theatre of the world: the hero in the field of battle has the love of fame, as well as patriotism, to support him. He knows that the witnesses of his valour will be the heralds of his renown. The martyr at the stake is divinely strengthened. Extraordinary grace is imparted for extraordinary trials. His pangs are exquisite, but they are short. The crown is in sight; it is almost in possession. By faith "he sees the heavens opened. He sees the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." — But to be strong in faith,

and patient in hope, in a long and lingering sickness, is an example of more general use, and ordinary application, than even the sublime heroism of the martyr. The sickness is brought home to our own feelings; we see it with our eyes; we apply it to our hearts. Of the martyr, we read, indeed, with astonishment: our faith is strengthened, and our admiration kindled; but we read it without that special appropriation, without that peculiar reference to our own circumstances, which we feel in cases that are likely to apply to ourselves. With the dying friend, we have not only a feeling of pious tenderness but there is also a community of interests. The certain conviction that his case must soon be our own, makes it our own now. Self mixes with the social feeling, and the Christian death we are contemplating, we do not so much admire as a prodigy, as propose for a model. To the martyr's stake we feel that we are not likely to be brought. To the dying bed we must inevitably come.

Accommodating his state of mind to the nature of his disease, the dying Christian will derive consolation in any case, either from thinking how forcibly a sudden sickness breaks the chain which binds him to the world, or how gently a gradual decay unties it. He will feel and acknowledge the necessity of all he suffers to wean him from life. He will admire the Divine goodness which commissions the in-

firmities of sickness to divest the world of its enchantments, and to strip death of some of its most formidable terrors. He feels with how much less reluctance we quit a body exhausted by suffering, than one in the vigour of health.

Sickness, instead of narrowing the heart, its worst effect on an unrenewed mind, enlarges his. He earnestly exhorts those around him to defer no act of repentance, no labour of love, no deed of justice, no work of mercy, to that state of incapacity in which he now lies.

How many motives has the Christian to restrain his murmurs! Murmuring offends God, both as it is injurious to His goodness, and as it perverts the occasion which God has now afforded for giving an example of patience. Let us not complain that we have nothing to do in sickness, when we are furnished with the opportunity, as well as called to the duty of resignation; the duty, indeed, is always ours, but the occasion is now more eminently given. Let us not say, even in this depressed state, that we have nothing to be thankful for. If sleep be afforded, let us acknowledge the blessing; if wearisome nights be our portion, let us remember they are "appointed to us." Let us mitigate the grievance of watchfulness, by considering it as a sort of prolongation of life; as the gift of more minutes granted for meditation and prayer. If we are not able to employ it to either of these purposes, there is a fresh occa-

sion for exercising that resignation which will be accepted for both.

If reason be still continued, yet with sufferings too intense for any devotional duty, the sick Christian may take comfort that the business of life was accomplished before the sickness began. He will not be terrified if duties are superseded; if means are at an end; for he has nothing to do but to die. This is the act for which all other acts, all other duties, all other means, will have been preparing him. He who has long been habituated to look death in the face, who has often anticipated the agonies of dissolving nature, who has accustomed himself to pray for support under them, will now feel the blessed effect of those petitions, which have been long treasured up in heaven. To those anticipatory prayers he may, perhaps, now owe the humble confidence of hope in this inevitable hour. Habituated to the contemplation, he will not, at least, have the dreadful addition of surprise and novelty to aggravate the trying scene. It has long been familiar to his mind, though hitherto it could only operate with the inferior force of a picture to a reality. He will not, however, have so much scared his imagination by the terrors of death, as invigorated his spirit by looking beyond them to the blessedness which follows. Faith will not so much dwell on the opening grave, as shoot forward to the glories to which it leads. The near prospect

of heaven will soften the pangs which lie in the way to it. On heaven, then, he will fix his eyes rather than on the awful intervening circumstances. He will not dwell on the struggle which is for a moment, but on the crown which is for ever. He will endeavour to think less of death than of its conqueror; less of the grave than of its spoiler; less of the body in ruins than of the spirit in glory; less of the darkness of his closing day than of the opening dawn of immortality. In some brighter moments, when viewing his eternal redemption drawing nigh, as if the freed spirit had already burst its prison walls, as if the manumission had actually taken place, he is ready exultingly to exclaim, "My soul is escaped, the snare is broken, and I am delivered."

Eternal things now assume their proper magnitude, for he beholds them in the true point of vision. He has ceased to lean on the world, for he has found it both a reed and a spear; it has failed, and it has pierced him. He leans not on himself, for he has long known his own weakness. He leans not on his virtues, for his renewed mind has shown him that they can do nothing for him. Had he no better refuge, he feels that his sun would set in darkness; his life close in despair. He is looking unto Jesus.

He suffers not his thoughts to dwell on life. His retrospections are at an end. His prospects as to this world are at an end also. He commits himself unreservedly to his heavenly Father.

But though secure of the port, he may still dread the passage. The *Christian* will rejoice that his rest is at hand; the *man* may shudder at the unknown transit. If faith is strong, nature is weak. Nay, in this awful exigence, strong faith is sometimes rendered faint through the weakness of nature.

At the moment when his faith is looking round for every additional confirmation, he may rejoice in those blessed certainties, those glorious realisations, which Scripture affords. He may take comfort that the strongest attestations given by the apostles to the reality of the heavenly state were not conjectural. They, to use the words of our Saviour, spake what they knew, and testified what they had seen. "I reckon," says St. Paul, "that the afflictions of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed." He said this *after* he had been caught up into the third heaven; *after* he had beheld the glories to which he alludes. The author of the Apocalyptic vision having described the ineffable glories of the new Jerusalem, thus puts new life and power into his description, "I, John, *saw* these things and *heard* them."

The power of distinguishing objects increases with our approach to them. The Christian feels that he is entering on a state where every care will cease, every fear vanish, every desire be fulfilled, every sin be done away, every grace

perfected. Where there will be no more temptations to resist, no more passions to subdue; no more insensibility to mercies, no more deadness in service, no more wandering in prayer, no more sorrows to be felt for himself, nor tears to be shed for others. He is going where his devotion will be without languor; his love without alloy; his doubts, certainty; his expectation, enjoyment; his hope, fruition. All will be perfect, for God will be all in all.

The period at length arrives when we must summon all the fortitude of the rational being, all the resignation of the devout Christian. If the mind be clear, the principles we have been learning, the prayers we have uttered, must now be made practical. The speculations we have admired we must now realise. All that we have been studying was in order to furnish materials for this grand exigence. All the strength we have been collecting must now be brought into action. We must now draw to a point all the scattered arguments, all the several motives, all the individual supports, all the cheering promises of Christianity. We must exemplify all the rules we have given to others; we must embody all the resolutions we have formed for ourselves; we must reduce our precepts to experience; we must pass from discourses on submission to its exercise; from dissertations on suffering to sustaining it. We must heroically call up the determination of our better days.

We must recollect what we have said of the supports of faith and hope when our strength was in full vigour, when our heart was at ease, and our mind undisturbed. Let us collect all that remains to us of mental strength. Let us implore the aid of holy hope and fervent faith to show that religion is not a beautiful theory, but a soul-sustaining truth.

Let us endeavour, without harassing scrutiny, or distressing doubt, to act on the principles which our sounder judgment formerly admitted. The strongest faith is wanted in the hardest trials. Under those trials, to the confirmed Christian, the highest degree of grace is commonly imparted. Let us not impair that faith on which we rested when our mind was strong, by suspecting its validity now it is weak. That which had our full assent in perfect health, which was then firmly rooted in our spirit, and grounded in our understanding, must not be unfixed by the doubts of an enfeebled reason, and the scruples of an impaired judgment. We may not be able to determine on the reasonableness of propositions, but we may derive strong consolation from conclusions which were once fully established in our mind.

Even if prayer were as worthless, with respect to present advantages, and religion as burdensome, as some suppose, it would be a sufficient vindication of both that they lead to eternal bliss. Of the precise nature of that bliss,

the Scripture account is calculated rather to quicken faith than to gratify curiosity. There the appropriate promises to spiritual beings are purely spiritual. It is enough for believers to know that they shall be for ever with the Lord; and though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, yet we know that when He shall appear we shall be like him. In the vision of the Supreme Good, there must be supreme felicity. Our capacities of knowledge and happiness shall be commensurate with our duration. On earth, part of our enjoyment — a most fallacious part — consists in framing new objects for our wishes: in heaven there shall remain in us no such disquieting desires, for all which *can* be found we shall find in God. We shall not know our Redeemer by the hearing of the ear, but we shall see him as he is; our knowledge, therefore, will be clear, because it will be intuitive.

It is a glorious part of the promised bliss, that the book of Prophecy shall be realised; the book of Providence displayed; every mysterious dispensation unfolded, not by conjecture but by vision. In the grand general view of Revelation, minute description would be below our ideas; circumstantial details would be disparaging; they would debase what they pretended to exalt. Those sublime negatives — "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,"—

fill the soul with loftier conceptions of eternal joys than all the elaborate but degrading delineations which have been sometimes attempted. We cannot conceive the blessings prepared for us, until He who has prepared reveal them.

If, indeed, the blessedness of the eternal world could be described, new faculties must be given us to comprehend it. If it could be conceived, its glories would be lowered, and our admiring wonder diminished. The wealth that can be counted, has bounds: the blessings that can be calculated, have limits. We now rejoice in the expectation of happiness inconceivable. To have conveyed it to our full apprehension, our conceptions of it must then be taken from something with which we are already acquainted, and we should be sure to depreciate the value of things unseen, by a comparison with even the best of the things which are seen. In short, if the state of heaven were attempted to be let down to human intelligence, it would be far inferior to the glorious but indistinct glimpses which we now catch from the oracles of God, of joy unspeakable, and full of glory. What Christian does not exult in that grand outline of unknown, unimagined, yet consummate, bliss — "In THY presence is the fulness of joy, and at *Thy* right hand is pleasure for evermore? "

THE END.

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